

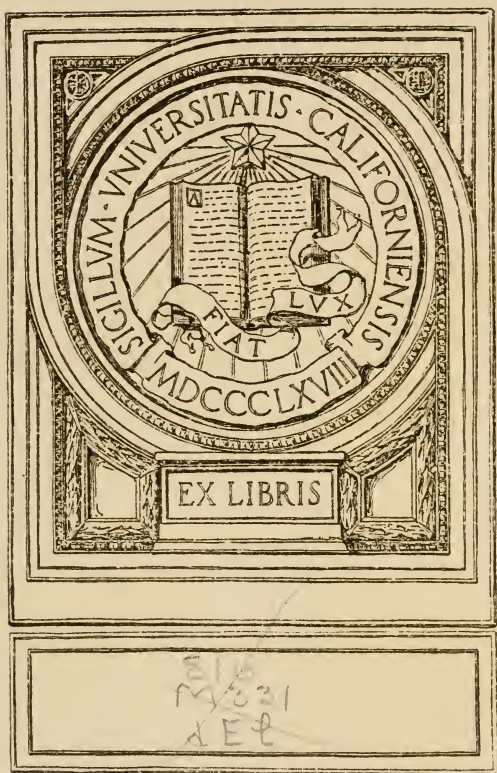
The Disaster

Paul & Victor
Marguerite

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M. ZOLA'S STORY OF THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR.

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THE DOWNFALL

(‘LA DÉBÂCLE’).

By EMILE ZOLA. Translated by E. A. VIZETELLY.

‘It would probably be no exaggeration to say that, taken as a whole, “La Débâcle” is the most wonderfully faithful reproduction of an historical drama ever committed to writing. “La Débâcle” is an appalling record of long-drawn-out misery, profligacy, and military and official incapacity, unbroken by any ray of hope or sunshine. It is a literally true Inferno. . . . Of the terribly life-like descriptions of the sufferings of the demoralised army, it is impossible to give the faintest idea in a single review.’—*Spectator*.

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THE DISASTER

BY

PAUL AND VICTOR MARGUERITTE

TRANSLATED

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR

BY

FREDERIC LEES



LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS

1898

TO THE
MEMORY OF OUR FATHER
GENERAL MARGUERITTE
AND
IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE ARMY
AND OF
THE TOWN OF METZ

P. AND V. M

PARIS, *January*, 1898.

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INTRODUCTION

ON August 30th, 1870, General Margueritte, who, since the opening of the Franco-German War, had shown almost unexampled activity and bravery, proceeded to the Monzon plateau, rejoining the routed army of Marshal de MacMahon. A juncture with Bazaine being out of the question, the army proceeded towards Sedan. After camping at Sally, and holding a consultation with General Ducrot, Margueritte reached Illy, near the Illy Calvary, sleeping his troubled sleep on the plateau there, rolled in the same mantle as his comrade in arms, General de Galliffet. When day broke Marshal de MacMahon opened the battle.

On the night of August 31st, the Margueritte division camped near the small village of Vaux, about three miles north of Sedan. The soldiers who slept that night must have been sound sleepers, for there was a ceaseless crackle of rifles in the darkness, a warning that at dawn the battle would recommence with renewed vigour. Indeed, hardly had the light appeared than the fusillade became brisker, and the booming of cannon could be heard on the opposite side of the Meuse, on the left bank.

Projectiles were commencing to deal destruction among Margueritte's troops. Drawing his men up in *échelons*, the General was preparing to charge in the direction of Givonne, when suddenly a whole Prussian army corps appeared from

the woods between him and the Belgian frontier, and, after establishing its batteries, opened up a hot fire. General Margueritte charged at the head of the 1st and 2nd regiments of Chasseurs d'Afrique. The fight, which had opened at ten o'clock, dragged on for hours. About two o'clock in the afternoon Margueritte was seen to fall suddenly from his horse, with his face to the ground. M. Révérony, his orderly officer, at once dismounted, and, taking the general in his arms, saw that his face was covered with blood, that he was unable to speak, but that he had not lost consciousness. Margueritte remounted his horse, and, supported on each side by Révérony and another officer, proceeded under the enemy's fire towards his soldiers.

'I shall never forget the spectacle of which I was then a witness,' wrote M. Révérony, in a letter to Mme. Margueritte, which is one of the most stirring military narratives ever penned. 'As soon as they had recognised the General, consternation was depicted on every face, each feeling what he had lost in losing his well-beloved chief. Every head was bent, swords were respectfully lowered, and one cry issued from every throat: "Long live the General! Let us avenge him! . . ." The General thanked them with a movement of his head, and still had sufficient strength to point out the direction of the enemy, striving to cry "Forward!" The regiments made a fresh and murderous charge, and those words, "Long live the General! Let us avenge him!" were the last which many of those intrepid officers and brave soldiers spoke.' A few days afterwards, namely, on September 6th, General Margueritte died at the house of the Duke of Ossuna, at Beauraing, in Belgium. The bullet which killed him entered the left cheek and came out at the right, doing serious injury to the palate and the tongue.

I do not propose to give a detailed account of the career of this remarkable soldier, the hero who was the father of Paul and Victor Margueritte, whose story of the war of 1870-71 is here presented to English readers in a translation. Such an

account would need a bulky volume, and the few pages at my disposal will only permit me to touch lightly on the subject of his eventful life.

Auguste Margueritte was the son of Antoine Margueritte, a quartermaster of gendarmes, and he was born on January 17th, 1823, at Manheulle, in the department of the Meuse, in the country of Joan of Arc, of François de Guise, and of Chevert. His early years were passed in Algeria, in the midst of the wildest adventures. Before he had reached the age of twenty he had served with distinction in a squadron of Moorish gendarmes, notably during the Holy War declared by Abd-al-Kader. When his regiment was disbanded, in 1842, D'Allonville, his chief, offered to pay all his expenses if he would come to Paris to study for Saint-Cyr. He preferred, however, to enlist as a private in the 4th regiment of Chasseurs d'Afrique, at Toulon, his bravery and his genius for organization soon winning for him rank after rank and post after post in Algeria. When he returned to France from that country in 1861, Margueritte held the rank of Lieut.-Colonel, and at the age of forty-seven he was made a General—at the time the youngest officer of that rank in the French army.

Though General Margueritte was a soldier by profession, he did not love war for itself, rather did he regard it as a necessary evil. As a proof of this may be quoted an extract from one of his letters, written on the eve of an African or Mexican expedition. 'Allons,' he writes, 'il faut encore mettre ces gens-là à la raison, et les rosser un peu. Quel ennui!' Margueritte's true rôle was that of an administrator. His knowledge of the language, manners, topography, and religion of Algeria made him respected among the inhabitants, and successful in work in the carrying out of which others would have failed. And, as has been truly said, 'his name, his works, his prowess are celebrated there—everybody knows of them. They are handed down from father to son; in the interior of the country, where the black coats of bureaucrats do not appear, he is becoming, is already, a heroic and legendary figure.'

In addition to possessing remarkable qualities as soldier and administrator, General Margueritte had the faculty of literary expression in a marked degree—a faculty which his sons, Paul and Victor, have inherited. His early reading of the Bible and Plutarch undoubtedly served to form that simple, pure, and clear style which is so noticeable in his ‘Chasses de l’Algérie’; and the directness of those letters—‘written under tents at random, on days when out hunting, or upon the eve of battles, upon improvised tables’—letters which his sons have done well to collect.

Paul Margueritte, who was born at Laghouat, in Algeria, in 1860, was a pupil at the Prytanée Militaire de la Flèche, and has devoted himself to literature from his youth. He made his début by a short history of General Margueritte, entitled ‘Mon Père,’ and from 1883 to 1896 he has published twenty-three volumes, the most noteworthy of which are ‘Jours d’Épreuve,’ ‘La Force des Choses,’ ‘Ma Grande,’ and ‘La Tourmente’; several volumes of short stories, among which may be mentioned ‘Le Cuirassier blanc’; and a volume of delicate impressions, ‘Le Jardin du Passé.’

Victor Margueritte was born in 1866 at Blidah, in Algeria. His first published work was a small but charming volume of verse, ‘La Chanson de la Mer,’ which appeared in 1889. He enlisted in the Spahis in 1886, entered the cavalry school at Saumur in 1891, and after four years, during which time he served as an officer in the Dragoons in Paris and at Versailles, he gave in his resignation in order to devote his whole time and thought to literature.

The collaboration of the two brothers dates nearly three years back, when they started work upon ‘Le Désastre,’ the most important, up to the present, of their joint productions. Several of their short stories, including ‘La Pariétaire,’ are already well known to readers of *Cosmopolis*. I believe that their first published work appeared in September, 1896.

For the production of such a work as ‘The Disaster,’ which is the daily narrative of the first part of the Franco-Prussian

War, the two authors have been in an exceptionally favourable position. Their sympathy with the subject of war, and the intimate knowledge of the army which the younger brother possesses, have stood them in good stead. Upon the publication of such a work as 'The Disaster,' it is not unnatural that some comparison should be made with M. Emile Zola's work, 'La Débâcle,' though in many ways the two works differ to a considerable extent: it may be as well to point out in what respect. M. Zola has depicted the disorganization of the Châlons army and the Sedan catastrophe; the Marguerittes narrate the heroic struggle of the army of the Rhine at Borny, Rezonville, Saint-Privat, and Noisseville; the long agony of the finest troops in the French army, day after day duped until the fatal hour of the capitulation of Metz by Bazaine. In 'La Débâcle' we have a vivid picture of war from the common soldier's point of view; in 'The Disaster' we have a description of war as seen by the officers. Pierre Du Breuil, the hero of the story, is an officer of the general staff, and an orderly officer of the Minister of War. He is, consequently, at the very centre of the military movement. At the time of the declaration of war against Germany, he has, like nearly everybody else, illusions which by degrees are destroyed as the war continues and the country is invaded. The Marguerittes have described the struggle between the conscience and the sense of duty of this officer, between discipline and revolt; the brilliant soirée at the palace of Saint-Cloud, the departure of the imperial train for Metz, Paris at the opening of the war, the disorganization of the army during the first few days of the campaign, the battlefields, the ambulances, the feverish excitement at Metz, the stagnation of the army in the rain and the mud, the horses disappearing by hundreds to provide food for the soldiers, the inhabitants of the Lorraine town encircled by Prussian troops, and, in conclusion, the heart-rending scenes of the capitulation.

It will be found that considerable space is devoted to the suspicious conduct of that remarkable man, Marshal Bazaine.

'The Disaster' is, indeed, in many respects a character study of the man whose ambition led to his trial for treason, his sentence to death, and, after his escape from Fort Sainte-Marguerite on August 10th, 1874, his death in Spain in obscurity.

Unlike M. Zola's novel, 'The Disaster' contains its lesson; it is calculated, despite its sadness, to sustain, not to cast down. The author of 'La Débâcle' gives a picture of war upon a majestic scale, after the fashion of a Tolstoi; Paul and Victor Margueritte belong to a younger school of writers, their descriptions of battle scenes being more episodic than those of the novelists already mentioned, so that at times the reader is almost reminded of the work of Stephen Crane in 'The Red Badge of Courage.'

But the Marguerittes have not given us a book wholly devoted to military matters. The affection of Du Breuil's friend Lacoste for his dog Titan and his horses Musette and Conquérant; the hero's love for Anine, besides many other incidents and characters too numerous to mention, serve to add brightness to a picture which might otherwise have been gloomy and monotonous. Sometimes we come across a description almost Stevensonian in its charm, as, for instance, that which puts before the reader the little cavalry soldier Jubault playing on his flute in a stable at dead of night the air of 'Marlbrough s'en va t'en guerre,' the melody striking upon Du Breuil's ears above the silence of the Ban Saint-Martin 'like an ironical and sad streamlet of water.'

The writing of such a work as 'The Disaster' has entailed upon its authors an enormous amount of research. During the two years and three months they were occupied in reading their authorities and planning their romance, they came to comprehend how vast was this subject of the Franco-German War, and how well-nigh impossible it was to treat of it adequately in a single volume. They have decided, therefore, to follow up 'The Disaster' with two other volumes dealing with the same subject—namely, 'Les Tronçons du Glaive'

and 'La Commune.' This trilogy, each part of which will be complete in itself, is given the general title of 'Une Époque.' In 'Les Tronçons du Glaive' the siege of Paris, the army of the North, the army of the East, and the two armies of the Loire, will furnish the authors with material for a careful study of the French soldier and peasant. 'La Commune' will, for the first time, give an impartial account of a period which embraces many things of which the actors have need to reproach themselves.

In conclusion, I may add that Paul and Victor Margueritte, while continuing their work on the subject of the 1870-71 war, at once romantic and historic—for the concluding novels of the trilogy 'Une Époque' will be prepared with the same care for historical exactitude as was 'The Disaster'—are writing a novel on the woman's rights movement, entitled 'Femmes Nouvelles,' which will appear in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. They also intend to write for the stage. One of their plays, 'L'Impasse,' has been accepted by the management of the Odéon, and the same theatre will shortly produce M. Victor Margueritte's play in verse, 'Le Pire n'est pas toujours certain,' translated from Calderon. M. Victor Margueritte will, in addition, publish in March a volume called 'Au Fil de l'Heure,' which will contain some poems written by the author since 1866, in the intervals of his military career.

FREDERIC LEES.

PARIS, *January*, 1898.

THE DISASTER

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

COFFEE and liqueurs had just been served by the butlers and servants. The majestic footmen, in green liveries, closed the dining-room doors. In the four large rooms from the Salon des Vernet, where their Majesties were, to the Salon Rouge, the guests were scattered in little groups.

Through the windows opening on to the Emperor's garden came the gentle night breeze mingled with the scent of flower-beds. The flames of the candles in the chandeliers and branched candlesticks were steady, unwavering, and were reflected to infinity in the tall mirrors. The floors glistened. Under the gilded ceiling, upon which were painted mythological triumphs, between the walls sparkling with light, was a movement of decorated uniforms—blue, red, and green; black coats covered with decorations; light dresses and bare shoulders.

Pierre du Breuil was dazed with this state of agitation and fête. He smiled politely at the last words of Mme. de Vernelay, and bowed without offering a reply. At that moment a stout man came up—a man with a ruddy complexion, white whiskers, and a honeyed manner, which was belied, however, by his hawk-like eyes. He was one of the honorary Chamberlains of the Emperor. Formerly the creature of Charles X., and the zealous adherent of Louis Philippe, he had succeeded as the crowning-point in his career in becoming attached, *in partibus*, to the civil household since its organization. He was

disconsolate at now being useless and forgotten, a man eaten up with regret and the necessity of being subordinate. With bitter amiability he asked the Major, who was an orderly officer of the Minister of War, for news of his uncle, the Marquis de Champreux, the Chamberlain on duty.

‘You are on your way to him. He is with their Majesties.’

‘And where are they?’ asked the stout man precipitately.

‘In the Salon des Vernet.’

He had already gone some distance. Du Breuil smiled.

The Salon Rouge was filling. After the grave events of the day, it was easy to see that all who had the entry to Court would be at Saint-Cloud this evening. One by one, in fact, showed their faces—those faces upon which could be read dissimulation, anguish, curiosity, or joy.

The library doors being open, Du Breuil crossed the Salon de la Vérité. On the right, and to the left, the Salon de Mercure and the Salon de Vénus were peopled by new-comers. There was a constant stream of official personages, members of the diplomatic corps, an ever-increasing crowd of embroidered coats and fresh toilettes from the vestibule of the large apartments.

‘Is that you, Du Breuil? What are you doing here?’

The Major recognised the shrill voice of General Jaillant, one of the directors at the Ministry of War.

‘Nothing, General. I have been dining at the palace.’

‘My congratulations.’

There was a suspicion of patronizing good-will in the General’s tone of secret envy.

‘Well, what fresh in your department? If the Duc de Grammont’s speech results in what it forebodes, we shall have some work to do. Everything isn’t very roseate for us. The very idea of saying there are people who envy us.’

‘They are in the wrong, General. The only duty of comrades is to fight. . . .’

‘Bah! When one has gone through the Italian campaign like you and I, nothing astonishes one. By-the-by, as you are one of the intimates at Court, can you tell me at what hour their Majesties will cross the saloons? Ah, Chenot! how are you, my old friend?’

‘Not so bad. Have you heard the news? Good-evening, Du Breuil.’

The Major saluted. The two Generals walked away arm-in-arm, talking in a low tone.

Du Breuil looked at Chenot's arched back and the red swollen neck which pressed against his gold-embroidered collar. The General walked with an unequal and halting step, the stride which he took with his right leg being longer than that which he took with his left. This action, stamping him as worse than a courtesan, was in imitation of the Emperor. Chenot—the stout, insensible Chenot, but a man possessed of great acuteness under his outward appearance of a Danube peasant—seemed to be on the best of terms at the present time with Jaillant. In reality he execrated him.

A new arrival had caused some sensation. The publicist Favergues, a tall pallid man of an ugliness at once *spirituelle* and malicious, who had been at the palace every day of late, jolted up against a fat, bandy-legged senator.

'Well?' inquired the latter.

'The people in the streets are restless. Paris is in a state of fever. The Minister's declaration has resounded like a blow upon a gong. "Vive la Guerre!" is being cried on the boulevard.'

'Yes,' said a deputy of the Opposition, subventioned by the Government, but who nevertheless betrayed both the Right and the Left; 'but stocks have gone down more than a franc.'

Du Breuil listened with anxiety. He had left the Ministry of War without knowing a thing. Arriving at the palace late, at the very hour of the invitation to dinner which had been transmitted to him by his uncle, the Chamberlain, he had hardly had time to salute the Marquis de Champreux, much less to inform himself of events. However, like a true soldier, he was a fatalist, and allowed himself to drift. War was in the air. Very well, let the storm break!

He approached a group where he recognised the grimacing smile of Mme. de Vernelay, a lady of the palace, who was afflicted with an envy which was kindled by everything, no matter how insignificant. To be envious was to her as natural as the act of breathing to others. Mme. de Vernelay glanced at Du Breuil bitterly. The stout banker, Manhers, rolling his white eyes, was holding forth in a low voice:

'This declaration is a crave imprudence. Europe will be tismayed. I haf heard from the Ampassador of a creat power that it would haf been breverable to take diplomatic steps. Nothing is cained by hurrying madders.'

The Comtesse de Limal interrupted him with an impertinent

imitation of his nasal pronounciatlon. She was a lady of high colour, and her manners were distinctly masculine. Her beautiful bare shoulders were like those church steps which have become polished by the lips of the faithful. She was a charitable woman; long prayers on the part of those who desired were never necessary.

‘Hurrying? What do you mean? Oh, war disquiets you, Baron? These Germans deserve a thrashing. And we shall give it them, shall we not, Admiral?’

M. La Véronnech, a little old man with a smooth Breton face, and eyes the colour of sandstone, very sad because of the death one after another of his wife and daughter, replied without a sign of enthusiasm:

‘Certainly, madame.’

‘The Duke spoke admirably!’ exclaimed Comte Duclos, one of the Empress’s friends, in a decided tone. ‘Besides, he only acted in conformity with the programme which was decided upon this very morning by the Cabinet.’

There was a tone of arrogance in everything Comte Duclos said, an arrogance which had something to do with the provocative expression in his face, the hard look in his eyes, and his waxed moustache, or perhaps with the annoyance which his wife’s conduct caused him. He adored this superb creature with large, soft eyes, and, it was said, beat her. She deceived him with imperturbable serenity.

‘All the same,’ repeated Manhers, ‘the pisness has been started too soon.’

Nobody agreed with him. The Comtesse de Limal shrugged her shoulders and, as General Jaillant was passing, took his arm. As he leaned towards the lady, the General—who in his uniform had a dry and puny appearance—fingered his moustache. According to scandalmongers, he had once ardently loved her. Du Breuil then saw advancing towards him the most redoubtable, the most captious of chatterers, M. Jousset-Gournal, a counsellor at the imperial Court, but he could not avoid meeting him—the man stuck like glue.

‘Well, my boy,’ said M. Jousset-Gournal, whose family relation to Du Breuil allowed of this familiarity of speech, ‘what am I to say to you?’

He lingered with delight upon his words; his gray eyes sparkled; one would have thought that he was experiencing a similar pleasure to that taken by an executioner who is about to torture his victim.

‘It was inevitable! Unless one was blind, it was impossible to overlook the fact. The equilibrium of Europe has been destroyed since Sadowa, and sooner or later it was bound to re-establish itself. The occasion is a good one. Southern Germany, where Prussia is by no means honoured, will eagerly seize this opportunity to obtain her independence. What is more, the Northern Confederation will declare itself on our side. Hanover will take up arms. Saxony, it is very evident, will support Austria, which is with us.’

Du Breuil cast a look of despair to right and left, but nobody came to his aid. M. Jousset-Gournal seized him by one of the olive-shaped buttons of his uniform.

‘Follow me closely,’ he said, pulling the button as though Du Breuil’s whole attention was concentrated upon it. ‘You must understand, I am not bothering myself with what will happen should war be declared; I have nothing to do with that side of the question. That is the business of you specialists. What really interests me is to see my previsions on the point of being realized. To-day is July 6. Well, four years ago to the very day, when I heard of the success of Prussian arms in the provinces, I said to myself: “There is our future enemy.” And, as a matter of fact, on the following day the question of the Grand-Duchy of Luxemburg nearly showed I was right.’

The Marquise d’Avilar, a dowager with bold features and the piercing eyes of an intriguer, passed them. Du Breuil saluted her. M. Jousset-Gournal stuck to him like a leech.

‘Unless I am very much mistaken, we shall very soon splendidly regild the imperial eagles. A Prussian prince reigns at our very doors. How can we think of such a state of things without indignation?’

And in a convinced tone of voice he recited, with due hesitation at each comma, so as to taste the sweets of the phrase, a portion of the speech delivered that day by the Minister from the tribune of the Chamber of Deputies:

‘Respect of the rights of a neighbouring people is not a reason why we should suffer that a foreign power, by placing one of its princes upon the throne of Charles V., should destroy the present equilibrium of forces in Europe to our detriment, and jeopardize the interests and honour of France.’

He recommenced with vehemence:

‘The Empire is strengthened by the imposing majority of the plebiscite. The will of France has made itself known.

By the mouth of seven million five hundred thousand affirmations it says to the Sovereign: "Persevere in the way so gloriously opened up by the canon of Sebastopol and Solferino." Dare people pretend that public opinion is disquieted, and that our credit is falling? Let us dictate our reply from Berlin.'

A bilious-looking little man came up and cut short the tedious speech which was upon the tip of M. Jousset-Gournal's tongue.

'What a state of enthusiasm, counsellor! Considering you are one of the supporters of the Liberal Empire, you are extremely bellicose.'

'But after the declaration read by the Minister at the Chamber——'

'The Duke was energetic, but, after all . . . he is a man who prides himself upon making Napoleons yield simply by squeezing them between his fingers. . . . Now, just think: without alliances in case of war we are lost. Austria? A country disorganized and without resources. Italy? That is worse still. Therefore we are alone, going to face united Germany, a country which will rise like a single man. You will then have on the one hand, my dear M. Jousset-Gournal, a strong nation, passionately devoted to its princes, served by numerous troops superlatively well drilled and armed. On the other hand——'

Clement Bris, the playwright, looked fixedly at Du Breuil, who recollected having seen him at the house of the Princess Mathilde. The two men shook hands. Bris's hand was limp; contact with it was displeasing. Du Breuil remembered that in the Princess's saloon, open to the élite in literature and art, Bris had charmed him with a number of others by the sobriety, the clearness, the wit, of his conversation, which was as bitter as truth. On this occasion also he submitted to the irritating charm.

'—— On the other hand,' continued Bris, and the Commander could not deny it, 'we have a brave but, nevertheless, an inferior army. Our effective forces are feeble and scattered. No army can enter upon a campaign without a special preparation. What is more, the law of 1868, which created the Garde Mobile, has remained a dead letter. Yes, I know very well that we have the chassepot, the mitrailleuse, and that our arsenals are full. . . . I am apparently blaspheming.'

Du Breuil, who was hurt at the manner in which this

admirably-informed literary man encroached upon his profession, looked at him and envied the intelligence of his bright eyes. Such truths as he had spoken seemed to him to be a little unpatriotic, and dangerous things to say. As a compensation, M. Jousset-Gournal made him feel inclined to laugh. His eyes were so much those of the chatterer, and his lips must ever be on the move. The effect which this stout man produced was one of solemn imbecility. However, his knowledge as a jurisconsult was to be admired.

‘Very well. Why not speak?’ he malignantly insinuated. ‘The Emperor does not despise any advice, and you are in a position——’

Bris shrugged his shoulders, and said :

‘The Emperor knows much more than we do. He doesn’t cherish any illusion. Should war become inevitable, he will suffer it, but he does not desire it.’

‘People around him desire it,’ said M. Jousset-Gournal, lowering his voice.

And forthwith he entered upon some interminable anecdotes.

‘Good-evening, Pierre,’ uttered a young and cheerful voice. And a white hand was laid on Du Breuil’s shoulder.

‘Is that you, Maxime?’

He recognised a club companion, Vicomte Judin, an Embassy attaché. They strolled into another saloon.

‘Will you take supper with us?’ asked Judin. ‘My trotters will take us in an hour to Tortoni’s. All our set will be there—big Peyrode, little Bloomfield, and Baron Lapoigne.’

All of them came up in Du Breuil’s mind—Peyrode, with his big red nose; Bloomfield, with his turnspit legs; Baron Lapoigne, an old night-bird, decorated with all manner of orders, who was recognised as an arbitrator in duelling affairs, and who was without a rival at cards, which he could shuffle like a conjurer. Judin added :

‘Nini Déglauze and Rose Noël will be there. Do come. Rose is free, and you know she isn’t a girl to be frightened at nothing. You know her motto: “Short and good.”’

‘No, this evening it is impossible.’

‘Ah, I see you don’t want to be unfaithful to a beautiful lady whose name I won’t mention, but who, at the Opéra-Comique yesterday, was looking for you all the evening from behind her fan.’

‘Who do you mean?’

'That's all right! Come, now, don't blush. I envy you. The Countess was magnificent. She was the admiration of the whole house, and Mme. Herbeau was wild with jealousy.'

'Because——'

'Her faithful one, Zurli, left her to go to the Countess, and the fine gentleman remained standing an entire act in her box, leaning over those admirable shoulders of hers. He admired them with that meditative air of the gourmand which he wears, you know, when he eats macaroni.'

'The comparison is somewhat——'

Du Breuil smiled and knit his brows, an action which gave a curious expression to his face. He did not like to hear Mme. de Guïonic spoken of. He even avoided thinking too much about her. His affection for her had remained in his clear soul like a pool of water after a storm has passed: delicious glimpses of sky, clouds and trees were reflected in it, but the foundation of it all had been trouble. He admitted the fact with ennui. Frank, upright, thoughtless, at times a child, a man contented to live on from day to day, he looked upon love as either a very frivolous or a very serious thing. Women like Rose Noël had an evanescent, a charming effect upon him. But he saw well enough that deep love, allied as it is to fate, had nothing in common with those pleasant meetings at which that bird of passage, woman, when the billing and cooing was finished, plumed its feathers and flew away. In his liaison with Mme. de Guïonic the thing which he regretted was that he had too long loved her as a friend, not daring to confess the full extent of his desire. The generous gift which she had made of herself had come too late, and was followed with regret, if not with remorse. His sense of loyalty was wounded when he shook the Count by the hand, though he well knew he was Isaure's husband only in name. Such scruples as these he still retained at thirty-three years of age, notwithstanding the fact that he had seen something of life, and that women had always spoiled him.

He dismissed the thought from his mind, for it had called up other thoughts, also melancholy. Why not, indeed, have supper with Judin and their mutual friends? He was tempted, but in accepting the invitation he would hurt the feelings of one of his old comrades, Captain Lacoste, Adjutant-Major of the squadron of Lancers of the Guard cantoned at Saint-Cloud, to whom he had written. A camp-bed awaited him in the small whitewashed bedroom on the first floor of the barracks,

which lay in the shadow of the palace. They had been friends when children, but, their paths in life having diverged, had rarely had an opportunity of seeing each other. Du Breuil had eagerly seized this opportunity of spending a few hours with him.

‘Well,’ said Judin, ‘I must present my respects to the beautiful Mme. Langlade. Come along!’

The diamonds of the senator’s wife were brought into relief upon her bare skin like jewels in a jewel-case. They sparkled like large drops of dew. Her forehead was prominent, she had superb fair hair, and her under lip protruded somewhat like a split cherry. No sooner did she see the two young men than she shot at them that quick glance with which she usually summed up the youth of a rival or the performance of a thoroughbred. It was a look which had the pretension of infallibility, and, so well does assurance carry the day, it *did* intimidate important personages.

‘Silence, Chartrain!’ she said in a peremptory tone, as she closed her fan with a sharp blow upon the fingers of a stout gentleman. He was ridiculously fat-cheeked and sanctimonious. Round his neck he wore the red tie of a Commander. ‘How can you retain such a hope? We shall never have a better opportunity. Ask our lords and masters over there’—she turned her head towards the saloon where their Majesties were sitting—‘what they think.’

‘It is none the less true that the Government has appealed for the semi-official intervention of the Foreign Office. The Cabinets of Vienna and Florence will also act. As to Senor Olozaga, who represents the Spanish Government here, he this very day wrote a most pressing letter to the Regent, asking him to place Prince Leopold on one side. That gives one hope for a pacific solution of the difficulty.’

Mme. Langlade shrugged her shoulders, and called Judin and Du Breuil to witness what she said.

‘Speak for yourself, Chartrain—you who are not even a militiaman. We are going to have a war, aren’t we, gentlemen? We must! It is in the interest of the country and the dynasty.’ She again turned her head towards the imperial saloon, which was the object for all eyes, the centre for all preoccupations. ‘The Empress is exceedingly beautiful this evening.’

‘The Emperor apparently suffers,’ said the stout official with respectful fervour.

‘Oh, the Emperor!’

Mme. Langlade’s drawling tone contrasted strangely with her former passionate vivacity, and it clearly revealed the secession of a party—that to which she herself belonged. She continued :

‘How gracious the Prince Imperial is ! What an admirable disposition ! Do you know, he really wants to set off, to place himself in the front rank. A very Napoleon !’

‘Poor child !’ exclaimed Chartrain, who, stout and ridiculous though he was, had suddenly assumed the air of a very fine fellow. ‘I hope that God will spare him the spectacle of such a horror.’ He turned towards Du Breuil, and said very simply, as though in excuse for his words : ‘You see, I myself have a son who is going with the army. He is so timid and delicate that his mother and I shall be very anxious.’

Mme. Langlade eyed him from head to foot.

‘The very idea ! I also have a son, but he is dying to fight. If he were otherwise disposed I should renounce him.’

A sadness came upon the fat-cheeked face ; a silent reproach appeared momentarily in his large eyes, which filled with tears.

Du Breuil was touched. His own family in their château in the department of the Creuse rose up before him—the manly face of his father, an officer who had fought in the first African campaign, and who had retired when young with the rank of Major, when his right arm was shattered by a Kabyle bullet ; the sweet, thoughtful face of his mother. They would be getting alarmed at the news—the father stoical, the mother keeping back her tears ; both silent, as was their wont. He knew the full meaning of this silence between two beings who adored each other. His younger brother, a Lieutenant of Zouaves, had fallen a victim to the Mexican expedition. His parents did well never to speak of their dead son ; they never ceased to think of him. Should war break out, he also might disappear.

For the first time the idea struck him forcibly. The sudden shock caused him to momentarily lose consciousness. The lustres and girandoles, and the flames of the candles, became vacillating and black. When he again saw the light dresses, the bare shoulders, and the uniforms a second afterwards, he felt as though he had just awoke from a dream. He had lost all idea of time. Was it caused by dizziness, fatigue, or simply by the stifling heat ? He mechanically crossed the saloons. Judin was conversing with a toothless old lady. Mme.

Langlade questioned a passing Minister. They seemed to be ever so far off.

Suddenly he found himself behind the large shoulders of Jaillant and De Chenot. They partly hid the wide, open doorway which led into the Salon des Vernet, and above their heads could be seen the sparkle of a lustre, and the large gilt frame of the 'Orange sur Mer.'

Du Breuil leant forward and saw the Emperor seated, speaking to the Marquis de Champreux. The Chamberlain was bending towards him, respectfully nodding his head. A vague smile appeared and disappeared upon the dull face of the Emperor. Slowly he turned towards the group formed by the Empress and the Prince Imperial, around whom, in a circle, were Comte Duclos, General Frossard, and two ladies of the palace. Du Breuil was seized with the fleeting and irrational idea that the Sovereign felt his isolation. His heavy face, upon which silent resignation was stamped, was puffed out under the eyes; the corners of the mouth were drawn in, and his long gray hair hung down like a symbol of old age. A tired look was in his eyes. When at table, Du Breuil had felt a sense of uneasiness at the heavy fixedness of that look, and he imagined he could read in it the paralysis of powerless goodwill, the clairvoyance of a mind disabused, and like that semi-lethargy upon which fatality has placed its mark. Suffering caused by the cruel ailment, on the subject of which the most intimate at Court avoided speaking, had given the august face a harassed appearance, which indefinitely disquieted him.

Prince Louis approached his father. He was a slender young man, and his black dress-coat, his white turn-down collar, his fair hair, and his bright eyes, gave him the look of a young Englishman. The Emperor looked at him as he approached with grave tenderness, and a peaceful, happy smile upon his face. He felt that he was no longer isolated.

A sense of shame came over Du Breuil, and, as though his curiosity was indelicate, he turned away his eyes. At the same moment he heard Jaillant whisper into De Chenot's ear: 'Not very brilliant this evening. . . .'

They turned round, and, upon seeing him, were silent. He could not exactly make out what he experienced; it was a feeling of something very solemn and very sad.

The Marquis de Champreux left the saloon to look for M. Favergues, for whom the Emperor had inquired. The name of the publicist was whispered from person to person, and, like

a train of powder, reached the owner in a corner of the room where he was conversing with Mme. d'Avilar and the banker Manhers. He rushed forward in the midst of the envious and smiling people, the former servile, the latter malicious. It was Favergues's newspaper which directed opinion. Mme. Langlade stopped the Marquis de Champreux as he was passing her. The Marquis, still a fine-looking man, but clothed with importance and exaggerated British sluggishness, was the possessor of the highest domestic virtues. His irreproachable dress and his tact set off one of those agreeable but selfish egoistic natures which protect men from all disagreeable emotions. His life had been a continued model of nice perception. His motto was 'Just enough.' Even when zealous he exhibited prudence.

Du Breuil, accidentally elbowed by someone near him, again turned his head towards the Salon des Vernet. He saw the Emperor proceeding with heavy step to his private rooms, his head upon his breast, and his back slightly bowed, followed by Favergues. The sight reminded him that time was passing, and that the destinies of this ruler of France and of the country itself were at stake.

How depressed the Emperor was! On the eve of a probable war, that seemed to him regrettable. But the glorious past was a sufficient answer for the future. Recollections crowded upon him. The victorious Empire greeted with trumpet-blasts and shouts; that radiant and magnificent return of the troops from Italy, in August, 1859: the streets and the showers of flowers, the horses covered with garlands, the bayonets decorated with bouquets, and, behind the trumpets, ahead of the wounded, the Emperor Napoleon, alone, preceding the army. He saw him again on the Place Vendôme, seated motionless upon his chestnut horse, sword in hand, the grand red cordon saltire-wise. He heard the tremendous huzzas from the stands, the shouts, the delirious cheering of the crowd. . . . Then, again, in June, 1867—those were always summer fêtes, with a clear blue sky and an unclouded sun—the Longchamps review, when the whole of the Guard, regiments from the four corners of France, one hundred thousand soldiers, were massed on the Boulogne plain, and an immense crowd of spectators filled the amphitheatre of Suresnes. In the midst of great silence, following upon the salutes from Mont Valérien, the Emperor, between the Tzar and the King of Prussia, advanced upon his black thorough-

bred, ablaze with gilding. One hundred and one cannon roared out, and the sound of prolonged cheering rose towards the blue sky. . . .

The Marquis de Champreux, bowing to this one, smiling to that, and, further on, straightening his figure to its full height, came towards Du Breuil, who said to him, somewhat ironically :

‘ Well, uncle, what decision does M. Favergues come to? Shall we have to pack our kits?’

The Chamberlain placed a finger upon his lips and raised his eyes towards the ceiling. His silence implied an infinity of secrets ; the fate of Europe seemed to hang upon his lips. Du Breuil’s mind intuitively conceived all those great and small mysteries—the most serious political *on-dit*, as well as the most petty details of the wardrobe—which for years past had been hidden in the old beau’s official brain. The Marquis de Champreux held out his hand to him, a white hand, with nails so neat that people said he placed sheaths over them every evening.

‘ Good-bye, if I don’t see you again soon.’

He glided with suppleness and firmness into the adjoining saloon. Detained by M. Jousset-Gournal, he said :

‘ Wait awhile. Her Majesty the Empress will shortly pass into the saloons.’

Du Breuil felt behind him a breath of night wind. He leaned against the side of one of the high windows and looked out upon the park, as black as ink, and at the sky, dotted with stars. The penetrating scent from the flower-beds carried him back to the conclusion of dinner, when he had also deeply inhaled that odour, delicate and mysterious as the presence of woman. He recollected his arrival at Saint-Cloud, and his presentation to their Majesties. Certain details, such as the conversation, the Emperor’s lack of appetite—he hardly touched the dishes placed before him by his pages—and the vivacity with which the Empress rose from table, came back to him. That dinner was an exquisite and flattering impression, and he would retain the remembrance of it all his life. He was content, upon the whole, at not having cut a bad figure, with his stripes, his cross of officer of the Legion of Honour, and his youthful appearance.

He felt himself especially attracted towards the person of the Emperor. The Empress had fascinated him, but to him she was the Sovereign, not an ordinary being, in whom the woman had been overshadowed by splendour of rank.

The Emperor appeared to him to be more human. He had a desire to serve him, to assist him in the coming danger. The splendid name of Napoleon had exercised an irresistible power over his childhood, and behind the Cæsar of the present he saw the laurelled profile of the Other. The epic shade rose up, dominating an overwhelming din of battles. He saw the defeat of kingdoms, battle-fields from which rose cries and smoke—Jena, Austerlitz, Marengo—the incense of the *Te Deum*, the imperial purple, the golden bees, and then the white retreat from Russia, the island of Elba, the eagle flying from steeple to steeple as far as the towers of Nôtre Dame; and, in conclusion, the most tragic downfall which the world had ever seen—Waterloo and Saint-Helena!—momentarily vibrated in his soul, and, in spite of the warm and luminous atmosphere, in the midst of ladies in evening dress and the decorated uniforms of officers, in the presence of that night of flowers and stars, the same singular sadness penetrated him.

A suppressed hubbub broke upon his reflections—the Empress was crossing the saloons. He saw her escorted by the Prince Imperial, and followed by the courtiers on duty, passing between a triple row of people, who bowed low. Mme. de Limal and Mme. d'Avilar were in the front rank, court smiles upon their faces. Jaillant and Chenot, swelling out their breasts, wore the fervent air of pious worshippers at high mass. Manhers smiled grotesquely, and the stout, fat-cheeked M. Chartrain, disconsolate at being hidden from view by the banker, was standing on tip-toe.

Du Breuil, standing in the embrasure of his window, behind dress-coats and bare shoulders, watched the Empress for a long time. She was tall, and in the full splendour of her maturity. There was something despotic about the charm of her fair beauty. Her eyes, of an icy magnificence, sparkled with pride and power of will. The restlessness of her thoughts gave her complexion, which was more animated than usual, an ardent and tender expression, the haughtiness of which impressed him.

She bowed to right and left, with much grace, and, as she moved away in deep silence, she every now and then let drop a word, nodded her head, or smiled.

He still retained her image after she had disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

THE whole length of the double flight of steps of the grand staircase was brilliantly illuminated by triple candelabra. He momentarily stopped upon the landing to allow a lady, upon the train of whose dress he almost trod, to move forward.

In the courtyard he took a deep breath. The water in the fountain-basins was of an inky blackness, and in the centre of one of them was reflected a star. The warm night was permeated with the wildness of the park, with the smell from the earth and trees. The whiteness of the statues, which stood in their recesses around the walls of the palace—the two wings of which they served to decorate—was strikingly apparent in the flood of light from the large windows. Carriages were in waiting for the guests. He passed through the gates before the guard, and descended the avenue.

Du Breuil liked this solitude. He took in deep breaths of air; he had a feeling of thirst. Then he experienced a sense of astonishment upon recovering possession of himself—his *very* self—just as though being at the palace and the importance of the events of the evening had conferred upon him a transient prestige which he had abdicated upon leaving. He regained possession of his precise and limited personality—a personality which was the result of his everyday life, and which was regulated by habit. The Du Breuil who had just dined at their Majesties' table was again the man who, in the morning, had been awakened in his small first-floor apartment in the Rue de Bourgogne by the pawing of his mare Cydalise, and the grumbling of honest Frisch, his Alsatian orderly. Dressed in a couple of seconds, he had set off for a gallop in the Bois to get rid of a headache, caused by a sleepless night, and a feeling of regret consequent upon losing fifty louis at his club. He felt certain that his horse had got wind-galls, and that his shoemaker had sent in his bill for the third time.

He almost passed the barracks without seeing it.

A sudden movement of the sentry near the entrance dragged him from his reverie. He approached the door and searched for the bell. He heard its tinkle, the grumbling of the sleepers inside the building, and a heavy step approaching. Then a key was turned, and the door silently opened.

‘Captain Lacoste?’ said Du Breuil.

Upon seeing the visitor’s rank, the corporal, who was half asleep, suddenly became wide awake. He stammered a few unintelligible words, and went for the quartermaster, who appeared from the guard-room, still very sleepy. He was a veteran covered with medals; a kind of giant with a phenomenal moustache. His figure showed off well in his white coat, and his czapska, tilted on one side of his gray head, gave him a droll appearance.

‘Captain Lacoste?’ repeated Du Breuil sharply, somewhat annoyed at having to wait. ‘Come now, quartermaster, wake up!’

An expression of sorrow, mingled with resignation, came upon the manly face. The non-commissioned officer bustled his men.

‘Quick there! Light the lantern! Gouju, show the Major the way!’

When his guide was ready, and the old soldier, motionless, his heels together, his right hand on a level with his forehead, his eyes fixed, straightened himself in a military salute, Du Breuil still felt confused at his hastiness. The silent attitude of the quartermaster was like a reproach. He turned towards him, and in a softened voice, full of politeness, thanked him, at the same time inclining his head.

Gouju preceded him. And as they crossed the courtyard, the lantern, swinging in the man’s hand, sent forth diverging rays of light resembling the cords fastening a balloon to its car. The feeble cone of light emphasized the surrounding darkness. The sleeping barracks was wrapped in deep silence. Du Breuil could only hear a few slight sounds coming from the direction of the stables—a monotonous refrain murmured by a soldier on guard, the sneezing of a horse, and the rattle of a rack-chain.

‘There are two steps, sir.’

Du Breuil entered a large building. A smoking lamp which was hanging on the wall gave forth a strong smell of oil. In the semi-darkness he could dimly make out a staircase. At the landing on the first floor the man knocked timidly at a door.

‘Come in!’ exclaimed a loud voice.

Lacoste, dressed in a small canvas coat and red trousers, sprang from the hammock in which he had been smoking his pipe. He silently held out a bony hand to his friend. He was a man with a long sun-burnt face, a red moustache and

imperial, and his frank blue eyes—the eyes of a child—gave him an air of coldness.

‘Good-evening,’ he said; ‘Gouju, be here with the lantern in half an hour.’

The man left the room. Lacoste smiled at his friend.

‘There is your bed,’ he said, pointing to his own, which consisted of some very rough but very white sheets, across which was thrown a quilt of Jouy cloth bearing a pattern of red flowers. ‘And here is mine,’ he added, pointing to the hammock. ‘Don’t think you are inconveniencing me. I sleep in it every night.’

He fetched out a bottle of beer, which was standing in a bucket of water to keep fresh, and filled two large tumblers.

‘Here’s to your health!’

They drank. Then Lacoste pointed out his pipe-rack, which was filled with pipes of all sizes—in cherrywood, meerschäum, and white and red clay—all of them admirably coloured.

‘Take your choice.’

Du Breuil took a diminutive pipe with a small negress-head bowl, and methodically filled it. Lacoste pulled forward the cane rocking-chair.

‘There you are!’

After these essential rites had been carried out there was a silence. Du Breuil had become accustomed to his friend’s laconism, and did not hurry himself to speak. He settled himself in the easy-chair, and felt quite at ease in that small room with Lacoste. He had a great affection for his friend. The window was open, and looked on to a mass of trees. Every now and then a gnat, attracted by the light, would fly in and circle round and round the lamp. Suddenly the edge of the green cloth which covered a table burdened with registers and papers was raised, and the enormous head of an Ulm dog made its appearance. His large eyes, like nightlights burning upon oil, turned towards Du Breuil, who called the animal to him. The powerful beast came forward, and, resting its head upon his knee, looked at him so searchingly that it seemed to say:

‘Are you a friend of my master?’

Lacoste’s face softened.

‘Last night he pinned a thief to the ground by his throat. Three ruffians tried to rob me on the river-bank. One of them I knocked into the river, the other took to his heels, and Titan

kept the third between his teeth until the patrol came up. Titan!' cried Lacoste.

The dog darted forward, beating the air with its heavy tail. It placed its paws upon Lacoste's shoulders, and looked at him—trying to read his thoughts—with infinite tenderness. Its red lips moved back over its white teeth, so that it seemed to be laughing, and did really laugh with delight.

'He is my brother,' said Lacoste.

The dog gave a low whine, and stretched itself at his feet.

'What are you going to do with him,' asked Du Breuil, 'should war break out?'

'I shall take him with me.'

Animals are adopted, not only by officers, but by regiments; and wherever the one goes the other follows. As an example, on the day of the return of the troops from Italy, there was to be seen a white goat with a black head, belonging to the Light Infantry, and the Zouaves' dog, decorated with flowers, and a flag stuck in his collar.

Thinking to please Lacoste, who had a great affection for his horses, Du Breuil said:

'Are Conquérant and Musette all right?'

'In splendid form. Ready to set off to-morrow.'

Again there was a silence. Then Lacoste, winking his eyes, said, in what was meant to be an off-hand way:

'Are they talking about it?'

'Where?'

'Up there.'

The point of his moustache indicated the palace.

Du Breuil took a draw at his pipe.

'Yes. They smell powder.'

Lacoste blushed like a child who has been surprised by some unexpected pleasure.

'All the better! One gets rusty. A soldier who doesn't fight isn't a man.'

He wearily stretched out his lean arms, and unintentionally, knocked against his large lancer's sabre, with its gold sword-knot, which was suspended upon the wall.

Du Breuil smiled.

'You will be promoted to rank of Major.'

Lacoste looked at him, did not immediately understand, and growled:

'Major? Well, I don't mind for the sake of the old people'—like a model son he sent half his pay to his parents, poor

peasants in the department of the Creuse—‘but in other respects, you know, I’m all right as I am.’

He looked at Du Breuil’s cross of an officer of the Legion of Honour, at his gold shoulder-knots, and the embroidery upon his dolman. It was not an envious look, it was only an appreciative one, and seemed to say: ‘We are of equal worth, but you have the additional advantages of luck and influence. All the better for you!’

‘As for myself,’ said Du Breuil, with a show of modesty, ‘I have nothing to gain, unless it be one or two years on the service-list.’

‘Pooh!’ exclaimed Lacoste philosophically. ‘After that you have a right to be ambitious. How old are you?’

‘Thirty-three.’

Lacoste drew at his pipe; it was a way he had of expressing his opinion. He was six years older than his friend; he had one stripe less, and he was only a Knight of the Legion of Honour. But he was not envious; he fully recognised Du Breuil’s superiority. They had been intimately acquainted when boys at the same village school, and Du Breuil, notwithstanding the difference in their ages, was even then in his eyes a fortunate and privileged person. The peasant’s son naturally looked upon the young gentleman from the château as quicker and more intelligent. The Du Breuils were liked in the district. Lacoste next came across Du Breuil in Italy, after leaving Saumur, where he entered after four years’ service in Algeria—four hard years of expeditions and bivouacs. And the Second Lieutenant of dragoons and the Lieutenant of artillery renewed acquaintance. Since then Lacoste had been steadily promoted, while Du Breuil had advanced in the army by leaps and bounds.

At twenty years of age Du Breuil left the Polytechnic, and spent two years at the Metz School of Artillery. What an abundance of memories he possessed of those days! His friend D’Avol and their mutual friends, the Bersheims, rich manufacturers—grandmother Sophia, the admirable household of the Bersheims, little Anine and her brothers! Forgotten were they? No; but separated and far off. . . . He was a Lieutenant when he left the school, and his first stripes had hardly had the newness worn off before he went on the Italian campaign with the two batteries of the Motterouge division which formed part of MacMahon’s 2nd Army Corps. It was a brilliant and rapid campaign. His guns had opened fire,

first upon Buffalora, where the Austrian forces were established, and then upon Magenta. In conjunction with General Auger's reserve artillery, they had destroyed the entrance to the main street and its surroundings, and prepared the way for the infantry attack. Du Breuil was wounded by the blowing up of a caisson, but had remained under fire, notwithstanding his bleeding face and his shattered arm. He was given the cross for that act of bravery. Shortly afterwards he was drafted into the Guard through the kindness of Marshal Canrobert, who had known his father intimately. He left the Guard to go to Mexico, a country of sinister memories, with its rains, its mud, its poisonous insects, and its unhealthy waters.

A fixture at the siege of Puebla, the third to enter the penitentiary, and wounded at the attack of a *quadre* during one of those terrible house-to-house assaults under a shower of bullets, he had been promoted to the rank of Captain. At that very time his brother, whose constitution was undermined by fever, had been invalided to Vera Cruz, and died there in one of those infectious streets which the zopilotes, those terrible vultures, alone kept clean under the leaden sun.

Since that time Du Breuil had lived more a fashionable life than the life of a soldier. He was attached to the Paris *état-major*, and with Marshal Canrobert, the Governor, found he was at the very fountain-head of useful and brilliant connections. During the 1867 Exhibition he acted as guide to the foreign officers, and several of these, including Baron Hacks, a Captain in the Brunswick Hussars, had left an excellent impression upon him. He called to mind Baron Hacks' haughty politeness. Were they going to meet again as enemies, face to face on German soil? It would be a curious experience. . . . Since August 15, 1869, Du Breuil, who had been made a Major, was appointed orderly officer to the Minister of War.

'No, really,' he repeated, 'there is nothing I desire. But, comrades——'

'We don't fight on that account,' said Lacoste. 'It is a sad promotion which follows upon the death of a neighbour. A man of heart does his duty without expecting anything for it.'

Du Breuil smiled in dissent.

'There are very few disinterested officers. The best of them dream of promotion and the cross.'

All the same, he *had* known men of simple heart, very heroes, very saints, such as Deresse, his Major, at Buffalora—Deresse, a friend and a father to his soldiers.

Lacoste raised his stern face. His tempered and noble soul appeared in his limpid eyes.

‘Egoists and cynics may be found everywhere,’ he said; ‘but you won’t find they are worth much. . . . It is only by introducing sacrifice into our business that it becomes the noblest of all.’

Du Breuil was more sceptical.

‘When one is brought into contact with those high up in the ranks, one meets with so much ambition and emptiness.’

Lacoste replied:

‘What does it matter? Just think: if, from the Sovereign down to the common soldier who is about to be made a corporal, war was only the sum and total of covetousness! Why, I should know nothing more abject! No; there is something sacred in war to everybody but the man with a heart of clay. War is the school of sacrifice—of the greatest sacrifice a man can make, that of his life. Take the case of a hobbledehoy of the fields, an uneducated countryman, who has never heard tell of honour and fatherland. He enters a regiment, a gun is placed in his hands, and he is taught how to use it. Then war breaks out, and you will find him undergoing cold and hunger, sleeping in the mud, and making his twenty-mile marches. The bugle sounds, and he will rush at the enemy, and will defend the flag, a hundred times risking his life. He is a changed man, having learnt courage, endurance, solidarity, heroism—all the highest virtues. But for war he would have been ignorant of them.’

Du Breuil agreed with him, but reservedly.

War might be the means of raising souls above themselves, but it also let loose the fierce animal natures of brutes. He thought of the cowards who came under the Provost’s jurisdiction, the insubordinates and those looters who were shot. Every army had its black sheep. It was only by means of terrible punishments that these men could be made obedient. Like a funereal echo he recalled those words—Death, Death, Death—which were inscribed in almost every line in the Military Code.

Lacoste filled the glasses. He blew away a fly which persisted in settling upon his forehead and on his hand; he was incapable of killing it. Then he continued:

‘Times of great shedding of blood are salutary. Fire purifies and blood washes. In times of peace surveillance is relaxed and discipline is bad. You yourself know this.’

Du Breuil nodded. Certain Generals had recently complained to the Emperor, and asked for the re-establishment of an inflexible discipline.

‘I can see serious symptoms of disorder in our army, which resembles the fresh complexions of those consumptives who are racked by disease. We shall have to take care. Debility slowly disintegrates large bodies of men. The reason I heartily welcome war is that it strengthens the nerves and the muscles, and puts new life into the blood.’

Du Breuil said :

‘Yes; there is something great about war. War is a terrible angel. There is not a man of us at the present time who is not ready to do his duty. . . . But when one thinks of those who meet with their death, and the grief of those who loved them with their whole heart and soul, is it not enough to accept this curse as a necessary evil without hoping for it?’

Lacoste, an expression of gloom upon his face, seemed to be looking far out into the night at his parents’ cottage, the trees, and their native place. Perhaps the old people, unable to sleep, were thinking of their absent son and the rumours of war.

‘One can only die once,’ he said, ‘and I don’t know a more glorious death.’ He raised his eyes, full of sincerity, and said religiously : ‘It comes from God!’

‘Amen!’ said Du Breuil to himself, moved by such conviction. He ventured to say, however : ‘It is all very well to fight, but one must win. We do well to count upon success, because in high places people are disquieted.’

Lacoste smiled somewhat bitterly.

‘There is something more important than numbers, and that is valour. Then, there is moral force.’

‘There is no doubt about our valour,’ said Du Breuil emphatically.

Lacoste rose to his feet. His shadow reached the ceiling, making him look gigantic.

‘With moral force, which everyone possesses,’ he said, ‘all will go well.’

‘Really, I don’t know what has come over me this evening!’ exclaimed Du Breuil, throwing himself back in his armchair. ‘There are times, like to-day, when one is alarmed at nothing. But we are not frightened at the thought of war, old fellow. We have seen many others, and we shall come out of this all right.’

There was a hesitating step at the door.

'Come in!' shouted Lacoste.

Gouju appeared with the lantern.

'It is half-past twelve, sir.'

'I must go on my round,' said Lacoste. 'Will you accompany me?'

He pulled on his blue jacket, and buckled on his sword.

'All right; I'm not sleepy,' Du Breuil answered.

They descended the stairs, perceiving through a half-open door a long succession of bedrooms. In the courtyard great white phantom-like figures with bare legs were moving towards the troughs. One could feel that the barracks was crammed with men and horses; the air was oppressive, and a deep silence reigned over all things. Crossing the courtyard and skirting the kitchens, from which came an unpleasant, musty smell, they passed the mess-rooms, and reached the stables, which were situated in a long building with windows shaped like half-moons. Lacoste pushed open a door. A breath of hot air met them. In the darkness could be seen the sleeping horses, some of which sneezed, while others, lying down, rose painfully to their feet as they entered. Some dogs were sleeping with their four paws stretched out and their heads thrown back, as though dead. A stableman came towards them carrying a lantern, in the light of which glistened the cruppers of the horses; the whitewashed beams stood out, and the straw matting which edged the litters gleamed. The man saluted.

'Who relieves you?' asked Lacoste.

The man opened his sleepy eyes.

'Labourette.'

'Where is he sleeping?'

'There, sir.'

At a vacant place between two hanging bars, which separated the stalls one from another, were sleeping three bare-chested stablemen. They were lying amongst the straw upon their cloaks. One of them was snoring; another was lying flat upon his stomach, so that one could only see the fat nape of his neck, which was of an astonishing whiteness; the third had his rigid, hairy, and yellow-nailed feet stretched out—feet which looked like those of a dead man. The last-named was the one who was next to be on sentry duty.

Lacoste walked through the stable to assure himself that no accidents had happened. Once he went to see if a large mare, which was restlessly pulling at her chain, had eaten her oats.

'She won't drink, sir,' said the man.

'You must show her to the veterinary.'

He passed on towards the horse-boxes which were reserved for the officers' horses, and pointed out his own.

Conquérant was stretched upon her flank, her large muscles standing out under her shining chestnut coat. Du Breuil expressed his admiration.

'If you could only see what a jumper she is!' added Lacoste.

Musette, which was a more refined animal, was sleeping standing up, her legs a little apart. She started, and turned her head. Her eye was black, with a white and pink pupil. She recognised her master, and neighed.

'My beauty!' he exclaimed, going up to her and putting his arms round her neck. He kissed her upon the nose. 'She's a splendid animal! Can do her five miles at a gallop without turning a hair.' . . .

He did not leave her without regret, and, with an eye for everything, he pointed out to the stableman one of the stall-bars which had just fallen, waiting until it was hooked up again before leaving. When outside they again breathed freely; the healthy but heavy odour, charged with life in a state of repose, had enervated them.

Lacoste continued his round. They made an inspection of the quarter, and then remounted the staircase to pass into the barracks proper.

'You'll forgive me,' said Lacoste; 'this doesn't smell very nice.'

Du Breuil advanced to the threshold of the open door of a dormitory. By the light of Gouju's lantern the almost naked sleepers could be seen stretched out to right and left. Above their heads were two shelves—one for the equipments and helmets; another for their saddle-bags and cloaks rolled into cylindrical bundles; at the bed-heads gleamed sabres and bridles, hanging from hooks. Racks for the lances could be seen on the walls, and under the bread-shelves were spoons and tin mugs. The succession of beds and kits was lost in the darkness. The only sound was that of hoarse and halting breathing. The first lancer, a very fine, fair man, was snoring with wide-open mouth. He was showing his teeth, and had the appearance of a man who laughs. His hairy breast slowly rose and fell. Du Breuil suddenly comprehended the brute force which was asleep before him. These men conjured up a

picture of manly energy, muscles ready for action, destructive vigour, and in the four corners of France at that very hour, in all far-off barracks—horse soldiers, foot soldiers, artillerymen—the drowsy army was sleeping like an enormous animal, whose breathing he witnessed. He imagined the awakening of these thousands and thousands of men should the cry, 'To arms! War is declared!' strike upon their ears. The vision was instantaneous and fearful. For the first time for a great while the dormitory, this simple room smelling like a den, with its naked sleepers, its accoutrements, and the flash of the steel of lances and sabres, appeared to him as a thing terrible and awe-inspiring.

'I am tiring you,' said Lacoste, continuing his round. 'You know the way.'

He pointed out a small door on the landing.

Du Breuil remained motionless, fascinated, on the threshold of the long room, lit up less and less distinctly as Gouju moved away with his lantern. The atmosphere was even more stifling than in the stables. The symmetry of the beds, the equipments, the sabres and lances arranged in regular lines, called up ideas of order and discipline—supreme virtues in an army. A great hope inspirited him; he felt young and strong. It might be that he had been seized with doubts and uneasiness in the gilded saloons of the palace, in the midst of bloated and cunning courtesans, and that even the Emperor's old age had disquieted him; but here, in the presence of these men asleep beside their arms, he fully recovered confidence. These were soldiers like himself, rough and inferior brothers; they symbolized the energy of France and the hope of triumph.

He again entered Lacoste's room. Titan raised its head, recognised him, and went to sleep again. The young officer walked a few steps, his hands crossed behind his back. Lacoste's shaving mirror shone from its hook near the window. He looked at himself in it for a long time. The examination satisfied him. He saw a large forehead, brown eyes, a silky moustache, a diminutive beard, a dark complexion, and skin the texture of which was firm and smooth—in short, a face containing evidences of good birth, and that seductive pride which pleases woman. Mme. de Guëonic's image came between him and the mirror. Then he had a sudden vision of his own face, disfigured. Supposing a bullet should pierce his temple, or the bursting of a shell should tear his face! . . . With a soldier's fatalism he shrugged his shoulders.

Everyone was destined to a certain fate. The best thing was not to think about it. He went to the window, and pictured to himself the sleeping palace, recently so uproarious. Then he looked at the stars, and turned his head towards the great red glow which floated over Paris in the dark sky. One word from the mouth of those two masters—the Emperor and the Empress—and France would rise tumultuously.

Until Lacoste's return he looked for a long time at the reddish light. A profound silence reigned; even the leaves stirred without noise. Never had the stars been more beautiful.

CHAPTER III.

DU BREUIL was seated at a desk burdened with papers, letters, and telegrams, in a room in which the Minister's orderly officers were working. Three of his companions were seated with bent heads at other tables feverishly transcribing into registers orders which had been written in great haste, dashed off with coloured pencil. Yellow, blue, and green portfolios, bursting with carefully copied service-lists, were in every corner, all along the walls, and upon chairs. There were piles of memoranda and reports.

A double padded door in green leather was continually opening and shutting. Aides-de-camp came and went after delivering hasty messages. A second door with glass panels, which opened on to the lobbies, was also ceaselessly being opened by restless and busy officers, who carried bundles of documents to be signed and stamped. Others came for information. The Ministry of War had been transformed into an enormous humming hive for the last fortnight. On every hand there reigned complete disorder. From morning to night the Minister's office was inundated with requests. The fever of the whole country seemed to be concentrated in those narrow rooms. Claims and complaints converged there; a thousand difficult questions had to be solved; there was an infinite complexity of detail. Hundreds of orders and counter-orders were sent out each day, carrying agitation and disarray to the four corners of France.

Du Breuil and his companions were over head and ears in work. He had been writing for four hours bent over his desk,

and every now and then the words came to have no meaning for him. He raised his head, his pen having ceased to glide over the paper.

'What is the date?' he cried. 'This is too much! Here I've been dating more than two hundred service-letters, and I don't know what day it is. This is enough to drive one mad!'

'July the 20th. Come, now,' growled Major Blache, nicknamed the Wild Boar, from the adjoining table.

He was a tough-looking old man, with a ruddy complexion, white, short-cropped hair, and an upper lip which stuck out because of two prominent teeth.

'Thanks, Blache. Are not you like me? I've scribbled so much that no use is left in my fingers. Oh for a little rest!'

He threw himself back in his chair.

'Upon my word,' exclaimed Captain Clémendot in a falsetto voice, 'we don't know we're living!'

He turned a bird-like profile towards Du Breuil, and, satisfied at the great depth of his remark, smiled with an air of superiority. He readjusted his fair, cunningly-curved moustache.

'Isn't it so, Major?'

Du Breuil nodded his head. It was quite true. Such an existence made one lose all notion of time. What events there had been since the dinner at Saint-Cloud!

It was on the 7th that activity had commenced. War appeared so likely that everybody was at work in the offices. The plan of campaign remained secret. There was talk of organizing three armies—one in Alsace, under the command of MacMahon; one in Lorraine, under Marshal Bazaine; and the third, in reserve, at Châlons, under the orders of Canrobert. On the 11th, to his painful surprise, everything was modified. There was only one army. The Emperor was the Commander-in-Chief, the Minister became General Commandant, and Generals Lebrun and Jarras, Deputy General Commandants. Du Breuil received the heart-rending information that he would remain in Paris with two of his comrades at the disposal of General Dejean, the future Minister of War *ad interim*.

He had been dumfounded by the news. At all cost he wanted to set out for the field of action. The prospect of remaining occupied with work which was unworthy of him, this wretched business of scribbling, caused him to pass from a state of great agitation to one of profound dejection. From seven o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock in the evening,

and even part of the night, he was there, in that stifling and heavy atmosphere, bent over his table. Events were coming to a crisis; incredible disorder, which was daily increasing, reigned in the offices, and the same state of affairs was spreading to the army.

He passed over in his mind the events of that never-to-be-forgotten fortnight. At one time it had been thought that the storm would blow over. It was on the 12th that Prince Leopold renounced the throne of Spain, and the King of Prussia approved of his action. But the same day troops and *matériel* commenced to be sent, and Count Benedetti asked the King to make an engagement that henceforth he would discountenance the candidature of the Hohenzollern. It was even whispered that Baron Werther, the Prussian Chargé d'Affaires, had been sounded by the Ministry, with the object of obtaining from his Sovereign a letter of excuse. There was then no longer any doubt—war was wanted in high places. . . . On the 14th, when he learnt of the unsuccess of the *pourparlers* at Ems, following upon Bismarck's telegram notifying the check to the representatives of Northern Germany abroad, Du Breuil saw that this time it was irremediable. That very evening he had worked far into the night, sending orders of recall to the reserve. The meeting of the Chamber on the following day was still fresh in his mind. Hour after hour his friends had brought him the news to the Rue Saint-Dominique. By their mouths he had heard the ringing speech of Emile Ollivier; he had been present when M. Thiers made his reply speech calling for calmness and reflection. But passions were let loose, the enthusiasm was general; and that midnight he had sanctioned with all his heart the last words of the Keeper of the Seals. It was impossible not to draw the sword and avenge the insult. With the whole army and with France he felt light-hearted and valiant of soul.

He was disenchanted in the days which followed. He was irritated by the agitation in the streets and the delirious patriotism of the crowd; he would have liked more seemly conduct. The departure of the troops was tumultuous. At the Eastern railway-station the people treated the soldiers to drinks, and very many of them became drunk. The hour, however, was a solemn one. The Duc de Grammont had just informed the Corps Législatif that the declaration of war had been officially notified on the previous evening at Berlin.

These reflections, which he took care not to communicate to

his neighbours, the energetic Blache and the bland Clémendot, perplexed him.

The whole of the day he had been concerned with orders relative to the concentration of the Army of the Rhine. Figures and names still whirled in his brain, and while he continued to copy other documents he again distinctly saw the composition and position of the various army corps—the first, composed of the African troops and those of the East, under MacMahon, at Strasburg; the second, troops from the Châlons camp, under Frossard, at Saint-Avold; the third, the Paris Army and the Metz Military Division, under Bazaine, at Metz; the fourth, the Northern regiments, under Ladmirault, at Thionville; the fifth, the divisions of the Lyons Army, under Faily, at Bitche and Phalsburg; the sixth, the regiments of the West and the Centre, under Canrobert, at Châlons; the seventh, the regiments of the South-East, under Douay, at Colmar and Belfort; and the Guard, under Bourbaki, at Nancy. He could not help thinking of the dissemination of the troops scattered along the frontier, and also the difficulties of their concentration.

The reserves had been mobilized on the night of the 14th; but the depots were at too great a distance from the regiments. Du Breuil thought that there would certainly be trouble in that respect; valuable time was being lost. A man living at Perpignan had to go into Brittany for his uniform and equipment before reaching Metz or Strasburg; and then, say, an Alsatian, whose regiment was in Alsace, had to hurry to Bayonne to get his shoulder-belt. It was very evident that the German method of district recruitment was preferable. As to the active troops, which were converging towards the frontier from all parts, they had come from the four corners of France, and it would not take less than a fortnight to arrange that, to divide up the men and classify the various elements. There, again, the Prussians, with their autonomous army corps ready in advance, seemed to him to have the advantage.

Upon the occasion of preceding wars, Du Breuil, in the limited sphere of action of a Lieutenant of artillery, had only to set off and to fight. Now things were reversed. Formerly he had been one of the wheels of a machine, which he was now putting in motion. He was at the centre of agitation, at the very heart of the army. Everything sprang from that centre and reverberated there. Thousands of telegrams were despatched and received. Generals and their staffs, administrative services, artillery, engineers, infantry, cavalry, active

and reserve forces, crowded the trains. At the mustering-points men, horses, *matériel*, and stores alighted *pêle-mêle* in great confusion. The railway-stations were crowded, but the magazines were empty. Complaints and demands came in from all sides.

That very morning a telegram from the Commissary of Stores had turned the offices upside down: 'At Metz there is neither sugar, coffee, rice, brandy, nor salt, and very little bacon or biscuit. Send at least one million rations immediately to Thionville.'

Du Breuil had had the text under his eyes, while Clémendot near him was classifying copies of despatches which had arrived each day.

The swing door was pushed sharply open by Colonel Laune, a very young, small, dry man, with steely eyes. He handed a bundle of minutes to Major Blache to be recopied.

'Urgent!' he said, disappearing.

Du Breuil stood up and stretched himself.

'Five o'clock! To think that I'm going to the Opéra this evening! Doesn't it strike you as curious, Clémendot, that one can go to the Opéra after such a day?'

The door again opened. Du Breuil turned his head. Colonel Laune said to him:

'Have you nothing to do? Take these papers to the Ninth Department, and tell General la Billardière that it is for him to furnish the particulars for which he asks. He must get out of the difficulty himself.'

Du Breuil bowed. When in the lobbies he met Captain Vacoissart, a little red-haired dragoon, who appeared delighted, and who cried without stopping:

'Good-evening, Major! Do you know I leave this evening?'

'How's that?'

'I rejoin the 4th Army Corps.'

'You're in luck's way!' exclaimed Du Breuil, continuing on his way.

It was too much, all the same! After so many times inspiring envy in others, was he himself to know what it was to envy?

At a turning of a passage he nearly knocked over an employé, who was loaded with registers to the chin.

'Major! . . . Major!' exclaimed a stentorian voice.

There was the sound of large shoes behind him and a knotty hand was placed on his sleeve. It was a priest, his cassock hitched up at one side and a stick in his hand.

'I am the Abbé Trudaine. I beg of you to tell me where I must address myself, to know whether or not my services are accepted. Wherever I go I am sent away!'

Du Breuil looked at him. His robust head, thickset neck and shoulders, and his air of jovial frankness, inspired goodwill. But Du Breuil hardly had time to stop.

'First Department, second bureau.'

'But I've just come from there,' said the Abbé piteously.

'Then, the Minister's office. You see, M. l'Abbé, we are buried in work.'

Orderlies moved out of his way. He mounted a staircase, on the landing of which was a group of officers in conversation.

'Good-evening, Du Breuil!' cried a tall artilleryman. 'You're going, aren't you?'

'Go to the devil!' fumed the Major, who replied with a vague gesture.

He reached the Ninth Department.

'General la Billardière?'

'Busy, busy—cannot receive anybody!' came from a harsh voice, that of a dyspeptic *chef de bureau* in blue spectacles, who never even looked to see who the speaker was.

'Communication from the Minister,' replied Du Breuil dryly.

The doors flew open, and the General in person rushed out, followed by a tearful Aide-de-camp, whom he had been rating. Seeing the Major, he exclaimed in a rough tone:

'What is it?'

His nose was pointed forward like a double-barrelled pistol; his white moustache bristled from his purple face.

Du Breuil carried out his mission.

'Get out of the difficulty myself!' cried the General, whose cheeks were bursting with indignation. Stupor and bewilderment were in his voice. 'This is too much! . . . A pen. Wait a bit, Major, and you shall take my letter back to His Excellency. I will add two lines. No, I won't; I'll go myself.'

He went out like a whirlwind. Du Breuil was about to smile, when a look from the dumfounded Aide-de-camp stopped him.

'Ah, Major,' he sighed, 'I would rather be dead than continue such a calling.'

And again there were the comings and goings of feverish employés in the labyrinth of passages, and words hastily

uttered by people as they passed. Du Breuil had to rid himself of an inventor who buttonholed him. The idiot sang the praises of his new gun with perfected projectiles. In one of the passages of the First Department, before the door of the sixth bureau (Infantry), Du Breuil was surprised to meet one of his cousins, a Captain-Instructor in the 93rd of the line.

‘Hullo, Védél! What are you doing here?’

‘Good-evening, Pierre. They asked us for some documents, so I am taking them.’

It wasn’t with pleasure that Du Breuil stopped. Védél was a poor relative with common manners. He wore thick-soled boots, and the gloves on his red hands were eight and a quarter. He was so timid that he stammered at the least embarrassment. He professed great gratitude, mingled with admiration, for his cousin. The Major, who had been of service to him several times, in his idea lived in a superior sphere of luxury, pleasure, and authority.

‘What’s the bet,’ thought Du Breuil, ‘that he also asks me if I’m going to leave?’

‘Well, how goes the regiment?’

‘Not very well. Heaps of work,’ replied Védél. ‘There are miscalculations, and we are far below the effective.’

‘It’s like that everywhere,’ said Du Breuil.

Védél opened wide his eyes.

‘Things will go, all the same,’ he affirmed. ‘It will be sufficient to open the ball.’

Du Breuil thought the phrase a comical one in the mouth of his cousin. He remembered having seen him looking so embarrassed one evening blundering through a quadrille at a ball.

‘I haven’t a minute to spare. *Au revoir*, my dear fellow, and good luck.’ He held out his hand. Védél several times shook it violently. He left to-morrow. . . . Would they see each other again? Du Breuil was somewhat overcome at this sudden expansion of feeling. ‘A decent fellow,’ he thought, continuing on his way, ‘but not very intelligent.’

Upon entering his office, Blæhe exclaimed:

‘The Minister wants you.’

His heart throbbed. What did the Marshal want with him? He crossed an antechamber—a large office in which Colonel Laune and several officers were working—pushed open a leather-upholstered door, and knocked at a second door.

‘Come in!’

He caught the conclusion of a phrase which General Jaillant pronounced with animation.

'Not at all—not at all, Jaillant. Everything will go right,' replied the Marshal, seated at a large table, the armchair turned so as to face his interlocutor.

He thrust a hand into his trousers pocket, and with the other took a large green pencil, which he rolled between his fingers. He was a man with a large nose and heavy, drooping moustache. His powerful face, heavy body, and full voice, breathed out assurance and authority. Although he also was buried in work, he affected a comforting calm, and seemed to have neither preoccupations nor doubts. He cast at Du Breuil a vague look, which, however, changed to one of meaning as he remembered the order which he had to give him.

'Go quickly to the central depot of artillery, and ask for the report on the manufacture of arms. This is the third time I have asked for it.' He turned towards General Jaillant. 'I have telegraphed to hurry on the manufacture of the last mitrailleuses.' Du Breuil was waiting. 'Go, my friend.'

As he was closing the door behind him, he saw Jaillant take a cigar from a box which the Marshal serenely held out to him.

He proceeded to the Rue Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin, but it appeared that he crossed on the way there with the officer charged to take the report to the Ministry. He returned and gave an account of his visit. A fresh piece of work awaited him. He was not able to leave the office before seven o'clock.

He made one bound to his first-floor apartment in the Rue de Bourgogne. His concierge was occupied in sticking small tricolour flags into a mignonette-box before the window of his lodge. In his warlike ardour, increased by recent libations at the wine-shop, he was crying to the equally important cobbler opposite: 'To Berlin! To Berlin! Forward!'

Recognising the Major, he made a bad attempt at a military salute, and cried: 'Long live the army!'

A martyr to catarrh, this man, ordinarily, never left his lodge, but sat there, with crossed legs, botching trouser-seats. His wife, an enormous woman, a scandalmonger and a coward, whose unique ideal was to make very sweet *café au lait*, ran after Du Breuil with his letters and newspapers.

'Ah, sir, how glad I am,' she exclaimed, 'that war is declared! And you're going to hack those fat sausages in pieces?'

He made no reply.

His orderly, who was a long-bodied man with flaxen hair,

was very shrewd, notwithstanding his awkward manners, and was devoted to his master. He had given up expecting him.

‘Anything new, Frisch?’

‘Major d’Avol came twice. He has left a letter for you, sir.’

Frisch, who had risen with a start, and stood motionless, succeeded in hiding a plate of *poulet au blanc* which the second cook had passed out to him.

‘Jacques in Paris—what a surprise!’

Du Breuil entered a small drawing-room hung with cherry-coloured damask, where, above an Oriental divan, some ancient weapons were crossed upon the wall. One of Octave Feuillet’s novels, its pages half cut, was resting at the corner of the mantelpiece. Music scores overburdened the open piano. D’Avol’s letter was lying prominently upon a table. Du Breuil opened it. His friend, who had obtained twenty-four hours’ leave of absence, made an appointment to meet him for dinner at the *Café Riche*.

He entered his bedroom. His full-dress uniform was lying ready upon the bed. Frisch had already carried hot water into the *cabinet de toilette*. Du Breuil’s refinement was to be seen in the smallest details, from the large scent-bottles in Baccarat crystal, to the exquisite toilet requisites arranged with the ivory-backed brushes upon a dressing-table with a mirror, framed in silver, which Mme. de Guëonic herself would not have disavowed.

She had paid a few short and radiant visits to this small apartment. He smiled with pleasure as he recalled the last one. A great impulse of tenderness carried him towards his friend. He reproached himself with not having loved her better and more; for no woman was worthier of inspiring a deep passion. Why was he not happy? All the same, he possessed the puerilities of a sincere lover, treasuring one of her gloves and a hair-pin—*fine* and annulated like her fair curls—in a small box. He had dined with her on the Thursday before at the house of Mme. Sutton. Since then, on Sunday, her receiving-day, he had hardly seen her. It had been impossible to exchange twenty words because of visitors. When he left she simply said to him:

‘You will be at the Opéra on Wednesday? I will reserve a seat for you in my box.’

He determined to make up for lost time this evening. He would sit near her, and they would converse for a long time. Would they be in harmony? It was strange to think that

soon, perhaps, they would no longer see one another. How quickly that evening would pass! He felt deeply how ephemeral things were, and his heart was oppressed. Tomorrow was dark and impenetrable; he lost sight of the way before him. What would become of their love when it was submitted to the test of their being parted at a great distance?

‘Fetch me a cab,’ he cried to Frisch.

The orderly was in his small and untidy kitchen washing down his fowl with a bottle of chablis, another gift from the enamoured cook. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and rushed down the staircase.

‘A quarter to eight!’ Du Breuil cursed himself for his lateness. D’Avol would be furious. He recalled his friend such as he had known him since their youth — a slender, well-made man, with an obstinate wrinkle on his forehead and a concentrated look of ardour in his eyes. They had left the Polytechnic on the very same day, and had gone through the courses together at the Metz Artillery School. Jacques d’Avol, with his stubborn, fiery, proud, and despotic nature, was difficult to get on with in daily intercourse. Antipathetic to the majority, he remained to his friends a man of exquisite nobleness of soul and delicacy of heart.

‘The cab is waiting, sir.’

An astonishingly thin horse was blowing between the shafts. The cabman was stout, as if in compensation for its leanness.

As soon as the cabman saw Du Breuil’s uniform, he showed great zeal, brushing the cushions of his vehicle, and smiling when he asked for the address. He finished by hoisting himself on to his seat with joyous ponderosity, and with a cut of his whip cried: ‘Geeho, Bismarck!’

CHAPTER IV.

THE evening twilight was in suspense in the splendour of one of those magnificent summer days which are long in dying. The Avenue des Champs Elysées, crowded with promenaders, was, as far as the sombre mass of the Arc de Triomphe, wrapped in a half-light. The Place de la Concorde was like an ant-hill, and a clamour arose therefrom. The crowd was running in the direction of the Pont-Royal, whence sounded the bugles of a squadron on the march. There were cries of ‘Vive l’armée—é—ée!’ words which, repeated by a thousand

throats, were prolonged in an uproar which died away in the distance like the sound of the wind and the sea.

The street-lamps were lit in the Rue Royale. The café tables had been taken by storm. A compact crowd was in movement on the boulevards. A double current of people walked along the causeways. People were discussing the contents of newspapers which had just been published, talking in a high tone of voice, and sneering. The women, in light-coloured dresses, were the most excited. Stout bourgeois pulled themselves to their full height, a martial expression upon their faces; some were leading by the hand children dressed as soldiers. Three girls in blue, white, and red dresses were entwined in a cab, and saluted the crowd in the midst of a storm of cheers and jests. The one in blue, who was rather a pretty blonde, was delighted with Du Breuil's gold shoulder-knots, and threw kisses to him.

Suddenly there resounded the 'Marseillaise,' bellowed at the top of the voice. The traffic had to stop. Some men in white blouses, at the head of a column of people (some with caps and others with silk hats upon their heads), forced their way across the causeway. The ruffians seized the bridles of the horses and brandished their sticks. A bearded old man was shouting so loudly that his eyes started out of his head. At his side was a young man with a pallid face, whose head, heavy with drink, fell from side to side. The stream passed on, followed by an acrid odour of perspiration and wine. Some young men and boys, capering like monkeys, formed an escort.

The cab stopped at the corner of the Rue le Peletier. Du Breuil, impatient, handed the cabman his fare, and struck out for the Café Riche. He had hardly reached the door than he heard the man, in a drunken voice, calling to prospective fares: 'Here's a good horse for you! Two seats for Berlin!'

A crowd was forming. Du Breuil turned round. Some people were making a great fuss. He saw the soft hat and the red beard of a man, at whom the crowd, with violent gestures, was hooting and hurling insults. A policeman appeared just as blows were given. A café waiter explained:

'It's nothing . . . teaching a Prussian a lesson. It appears he advised the cabman to get a better animal if he wanted to reach Berlin.'

Du Breuil glanced at the terrace. Not a table was free! D'Avol was probably waiting for him in the restaurant. The sudden heat and the smell from the kitchen were suffocating.

'Are you looking for someone, sir?' asked the butler, with marked obsequiousness.

The animation under the white gas-globes and in the midst of the uproar of voices was extraordinary. Busy waiters, carrying a dish in each hand, wound their way in and out in the large room; even the cellar-men put off their usual air of solemn gravity, and went from table to table with quick step.

'Yes, sir. If you will allow me——' and the butler guided Du Breuil amidst the diners.

'We don't notice our friends any more. How proud this soldier is!'

It was big Peyrode, seated between Rose Noël and Bloomfield, who spoke. He made pretence to propose a toast. Du Breuil smiled at the group, and thanked them with a nod of his head. Peyrode's nose was redder than ever. . . .

D'Avol at last! He was buried in the *Figaro*, his elbows resting on the tablecloth. The table was set. A number of unfolded newspapers were near him, witnessing to a lengthy wait. The two officers shook hands. Du Breuil sat down. One waiter took his sword, another his shako.

'Serve us quickly,' said D'Avol.

The butler bowed respectfully, and straightened himself up again as though worked by a spring. He placed the *hors-d'œuvre* upon the table, and hurried the cellarman.

'Decidedly the army is held in honour to-day,' thought Du Breuil.

He was very pleased to see his friend again. He inquired after his health and his affairs. What had happened at Versailles? How was it that he had obtained leave of absence?

Jacques, without losing a mouthful, placed him *au courant*. Between two train times he had come to kiss his mother. He had taken lunch with her at Saint-Germain, where she resided. The afternoon had been occupied in making purchases and transacting business. He would return after the Opéra.

While the cold trout was being removed and a duckling à la Rouennaise was being brought, the butler inquired what they would take next.

'Lamb cutlets? Asparagus-heads? And as an entremets, iced peaches, Macédoine à la Prussienne'—he smiled discreetly—'or Bombe Magenta?'

The hum of conversation, the blue spirals of tobacco-smoke, the brilliant light of lustres reflected to infinity in the mirrors—everything excited D'Avol. He forgot the day's fatigue,

and felt a keen happiness from the warmth of the repast and the movement in the room. The noise of the street came in through the open windows, a continual humming, with now and then cheers and cries.

'How I envy you!' he said feverishly. 'You are at the very source. Decisions and news—everything passes through your hands. I don't deny you have work. We have quite as much, but we are in complete ignorance. Reviews . . . reviews . . . reviews the whole week. Time passes very slowly with these minutiae. Orders and counter-orders. . . . First we're going to set off, and then we're not. However, the great day comes after to-morrow, and then farewell, Versailles! *En route* for Nancy, and Metz at our journey's end. Eh! but it will be a pleasure to us, old fellow, to see Metz again. You are very lucky in not having been chosen, but, as certain as I am sitting here, you will trail your sword on the Esplanade before I do.'

'May God hear you!' exclaimed Du Breuil.

'You recollect the Café Parisien . . . and the games at billiards . . . and our dinners at the Hôtel de l'Europe on Sundays when we were not invited to the Bersheims?'

Recollections crowded upon them. They called over the names of their professors, smiling as they conjured up their fads and their ridiculous ways. They evoked the hospitable Bersheim household, where, in all truth, they had passed many happy hours. M. Bersheim, a distant cousin of D'Avol, was a rich manufacturer, possessed of a jovial and upright nature—in short, one of the best of men. And Mme. Bersheim, that amiable woman, so beautiful and so sweet! Du Breuil recalled the *bonnet à coques* and the peaceful old face of Grandmother Sophia, the gaiety of the two sons, and, in particular, the delicate charm of little Anine.

'It is curious to think,' he said, 'that we shall perhaps very shortly be fighting in that smiling country of the Moselle, on the spot where we drank the rosy-coloured wine of Sey. Over the roads which we followed with slackened rein on our morning rides, we shall again pass revolver in hand and eyes alert.'

'You must be mad!' exclaimed D'Avol. 'Metz will never be the scene of the struggle. A well-informed man like you tell me such a thing as that!'

'The man who knows the true plan of campaign is a very sharp fellow. Only one thing is certain: the first one ready has the advantage.'

D'Avol shrugged his shoulders.

'We have been ready a week,' he said, 'and a child can trace the plan of campaign. Once the army is concentrated, and we cross the Rhine between Maxau and Germersheim, issuing into the Baden country, Northern Germany is separated from the south. Bavaria and Wurtemberg are immobilized. Austria and Italy take up arms. And that famous Northern Germany remains.' He made a gesture of indifference. . . . 'Our grandfathers were at Jena.'

The iced peaches were served. At the same moment the conversation was drowned in the noise from the street. There were peals of laughter and ironical cheers; the crowd had become rowdy. Suddenly the people swept in the direction of the Variétés. Some hustled women screamed. A number of *voyous* were descending the boulevard, holding brooms coated with resin, which did duty for torches. Three of their number were carrying in triumph a soldier of the line. They were singing at the top of their voices, and as much out of tune as possible, the hymn of the Girondins. Smoky tongues of flame sprang from their brands in the gathering darkness. They passed the Café Riche, and the diners from their seats saw the red train of fire which, amidst a multitude of sparks, waved above the heads of the people. 'Mourir pour la patrie!' . . . ever yelled voices thickened by wine. Then, at the end of the strophes, there came, with animal cries: 'To Chaillot, the King of Prussia!'

Du Breuil continued:

'I have good hope. The stupidities of these first few days are inevitable. Everything will come right. It is a curious thing, however, that, in spite of this general enthusiasm, there are so few voluntary enlistments. There has not been the great zeal shown which was expected.'

'All the better!' exclaimed D'Avol sharply. He raised his face and looked at Du Breuil. His hair, thick and fine, was short-cut, resembling a brush. An intelligent look was in his eyes. 'So far, only trained soldiers. What results have the militia given? Nothing very great. We have no need of anybody. Once the mitrailleuses are working, and it will be a matter of a fortnight. Aren't these mitrailleuses simply astonishing? You've read the account of the trials at Satory?''*

* The trials of the new weapon were made at Meudon, in the presence of Colonel Verchère de Reffye and other officers. The greatest secrecy was observed. It was only after the war that the capabilities of the mitrailleuse were publicly known, the report of the General who com-

'I was there,' answered Du Breuil. 'Three hundred "screws," purchased from the knacker at four and sixpence apiece, were massed on the plain. Two mitrailleuses were being worked, and at the second discharge the whole cavalry was down. On the next day the experiments were continued, and there was a general massacre at the first round.'

'Marvellous!'

'Unfortunately, they have only been able so far to manufacture one hundred and ninety.'

However confident Du Breuil might be, he could not forget the undoubted superiority of the Prussian artillery. He had read at the Ministry the reports of Colonel Stoppel, the military attaché at Berlin. Various reports of officers sent on missions spoke well also of the Belgian artillery, which had recently been imported from Germany; range and accuracy of shooting were surprising.

D'Avol replied:

'Don't bother me! There is some good in the Solferino artillery. Since we compare armaments, however, I reply by calling attention to the chassepot, which is worth fifty Dreyse rifles. . . . First of all, it has a small bore; then, it is easily handled, and can readily be brought to the shoulder. The other gun is heavy and cumbersome. That, however, is not the question. A club which is manipulated with strength will always be better than the finest blade in unskilful hands. Courage is everything. . . .'

He sipped a cup of coffee. Liqueurs and various boxes of cigars were brought. Du Breuil chose a dry, light-coloured Havana, and cut off the end.

'I was just reading a very well-written article,' continued D'Avol. 'The newspapers are unanimous, aren't they?'

'Quite,' replied Du Breuil. 'And what enthusiasm! I saw the 7th battalion of Chasseurs go by, headed by some workmen. The staff was surrounded by friends, Saint-Cyrians and young ladies carrying bouquets. The people had mingled with the rank and file. One had seized a gun, and another a knapsack. There were citizens with képis, and soldiers with caps upon their heads. The waggons, decorated with small flags, followed. Kisses were thrown to the cantinières.'

'That promises well for the return,' said D'Avol, in conclusion.

manded the troops at the Sarrebrück engagement stating that the officers were enthusiastic over its destructive powers.—F. L.

The two officers took down their swords, and placed their shakos upon their heads. The room was half empty. The waiters moved to one side out of their way. The patriotic butler, a napkin under his arm, followed them at a distance, and, as they were about to pass out, made a deep bow, revealing a pink and shiny baldness.

The boulevard was black with people. A prodigious success was obtained by a cab from which gesticulated ten young men piled one on the top of another. Above a medley of arms, holding Chinese lanterns, swayed an enormous flag. Someone cried: 'Long live peace!' There was a grumbling among the crowd; fifty furious voices protested, crying: 'Down with cowards!' A diversion was created by two officers in brilliant uniforms, who came out. The people cried: 'Long live France!'

Du Breuil's spur caught a lady's skirt. She was dark, and had blue eyes—the air of a young bride. He apologized, but she prettily answered:

'Not at all—not at all, sir.'

And, blushing, not only she, but her husband as well, appeared delighted. D'Avol and Du Breuil wound their way along the Rue le Peletier. Between the houses on a level with the causeway a strong light came through the doors of the Opéra. The ticket-takers bowed and smiled, an usher with a chain round his neck preceded them to the foot of the staircase, where D'Avol took his leave to find one of his cousins in the orchestra stalls.

'So long!' exclaimed Du Breuil.

The box-keeper introduced him. Mme. de Guïonic turned her beautiful eyes towards him, and greeted him with a slight inflection of the neck, whose proud grace rippled to the shoulders. The two front-seats she had given up to Mme. and Mdlle. le Prêcheur. Du Breuil liked these people very much. The daughter was ugly, simple, and good; the mother, who at one time had got herself talked about, was still indulgent, notwithstanding the hypercriticism which she affected. She even countenanced, with serene complicity, certain liaisons. Mme. le Prêcheur's father, a respectable old man, was at the back of the box, and had been asleep since the dances in the first act. Being stone-deaf, the music didn't trouble him much.

Du Breuil sat near to Mme. de Guïonic and explained the reason for his lateness. Mme. le Prêcheur smiled and singled

out D'Avol in the orchestra with her opera-glass. Mdlle. le Prêcheur's whole attention was riveted on the stage. She was engrossed in Masaniello, and fanned herself with emotion.

At that very moment Fenella, La Muette, abandoned by the Viceroy of Naples, and made the wife of Elvire, was confessing her dishonour to her brother. Masaniello swore to avenge her.

Du Breuil found Mme. de Guïonic possessed of a charm more absorbing than ever. Until his appearance she had been cold and serious, the regularity alone of her features, and the harmonious contour of her bust, making her a beautiful woman. 'A marble!' Mme. Herbeau, in a box opposite, was about to spitefully say to the Chevalier Zurli.

But she was living now.

A slight colour had mounted to her face; the texture of her skin had taken a nacreous lustre; she seemed transfigured.

Du Breuil saw Mme. Herbeau bend towards Zurli, and from their expression saw that she was speaking of them.

Diamonds sparkled on white throats, faces were lit up in the light which flooded the gay house, decorated in red and gold after the Italian style. Many of those present were well known to Du Breuil. Everybody of note in Paris was there. It had been rumoured that the Emperor and Empress would be present at the performance. It was known now, however, that their Majesties would not come; but, to give an official character to the occasion, the Duc de Grammont and Vicomte Laferrière were seated in the small official box. The Duc and the Duchesse de Mouchy made their appearance. Du Breuil admired the Duchess's fine profile, crowned with a garland of corn-flowers. In the orchestra stalls he recognised Jaillant, Bris, Jousset-Gournal; in the first boxes Manhers and his family, farther on General Chenot—with a moustache like a grenadier—Mme. Langlade and the Marquise d'Avilar. The last-named escorted a young lady, whom she was trying to lead astray (under the very eyes of the husband), for the benefit of a bald diplomatist. People were impatiently waiting for Marie Sass, who was to sing the 'Marseillaise.' The whole house was in a state of feverish excitement. It was plain from keen glances and animated faces that everybody was similarly pre-occupied—these women in ball-dresses, these men mostly covered with decorations, Generals, artists, literary men, senators, deputies, lights of the Bar and of the medical faculty, large manufacturers, and idlers, all those in this luxurious and

showy gathering of the élite who this evening represented France.

The Neapolitan fishermen on the stage were revolting at the instigation of Masaniello; then, to hide their designs they sang a barcarolle. The chorus of young girls was resumed:

‘L’Amour s’enfuit, le temps s’envole;
Le temps emporte nos plaisirs
Comme les flots une gondole!’

The curtain fell. After exchanging a few words with the Le Prêcheur ladies, Du Breuil rejoined Mme. de Guïonic, who was readjusting the aigrette in her hair before a mirror in the saloon adjoining the box. He admired the pure line of her raised arm. She drooped her long and silky eyelashes under his expressive look. He admired the delicacy of her eyelids, convex like rose-leaves. They spoke calmly, however, of ordinary things. But Du Breuil’s look, passionately fixed upon her, compelled Mme. de Guïonic to look up. His gaze penetrated to the very centre of her being. A movement of his lips expressed ‘I love you.’

The delight which she felt made her still more beautiful. She turned away her head. A worshipper of heroism, she was both exalted and saddened by war. To lose him. . . . Suppose he was wounded! Her proud heart prompted her to dismiss all personal sentiments of egoism or cowardice. So she smiled courageously, and was persuaded, as was stated on every hand, that the campaign would be short, and that glory would compensate for its perils. Du Breuil appeared to her greater because he was going to fight; she loved him better.

‘Do you recollect our visit to the Salon?’ he asked. ‘You had on a pearl-gray moire dress. We lingered for a long time before Robert Fleury’s picture.’

What picture? Ah yes! ‘Le Dernier Jour de Corinthe.’ It had made quite a sensation, had obtained the *grande médaille d’or*. The canvas reappeared before him. Women and children in the midst of the supreme disaster had taken refuge under the statue of Minerva. In the distance the Consul Mummius, on horseback, was appearing with his legions. The massacre had commenced, and the survivors were being sold as slaves. Among the half-naked group in the foreground—beautiful bodies stretched on the ground, virgins and mothers driven to despair—was a veiled woman on her knees, with uncovered breast, watching the approach of the conquerors.

‘Why do you ask?’ she said.

He smiled without replying. If he especially recollected the face of that woman, it was because she strangely resembled Mme. de Guïonic. Other people had made the same remark that day. Other recollections crowded upon him.

'And the hunt at Fontainebleau, when you received the button? On the previous day you showed me your green cloth habit, and you wore upon your head a little *lampion* hat with a white feather, which gave you an audacious and charming air.' He spoke low; his breath caressed her. 'I can see you yet at the last ball at the Tuileries. I followed you up the wide, long staircase between the soldiers of the Cent-gardes drawn up in line and the flowers on the staircase. The opal bracelet which you wear came undone just as you were entering the Salle des Maréchaux.'

'This bracelet,' she said, 'has never caused me anything but trouble.'

He smiled.

'Opals are unlucky.'

The door of the box was opened. Maxime Judin and M. Langlade entered. The senator inquired after the health of Mme. de Guïonic. And how was the Count? He was, then, going to remain in Brittany this year? The pretext which she gave was her husband's indisposition, but everybody knew the real reason for this prolonged absence—a certain Mme. de Ploguern, their neighbour, was not a stranger to it. M. Langlade had only come, however, to speak to Du Breuil. When would the Chasseurs d'Afrique leave?—his son, a Second Lieutenant at Oran, was burning to set off.

'At his age young men think the more mischief there is, the better the sport.'

Vicomte Judin was telling Mme. de Guïonic the latest pieces of scandal. He raised his head at the senator's words, and said joyously:

'Certainly! Do you know, Pierre, I've enlisted.'

He enjoyed the effect which this announcement produced. They congratulated him.

'The Colonel of the 93rd consents to take me.'

'The 93rd? Why, that is my Cousin Védel's regiment!'

'You'll recommend me!' exclaimed Judin, laughing.

Why had this titled and rich young man, who enjoyed a sinecure at the Quai d'Orsay, enlisted? Because it was *chic*, and because of a liking for action and adventure. And, then, he was tired of living a wild life.

'Pooh!' he concluded, 'it is only a little voyage on the Rhine.'

D'Avol appeared. He came to offer his respects to Mme. le Prêcheur. He bowed low before Mme. de Guïonic, to whom he was introduced. Judin and Langlade had left. The three blows announcing the raising of the curtain rang out, and D'Avol only remained a moment. He nervously clasped Du Breuil's hand.

'*Au revoir*, my dear fellow!'

The door was closed again.

'I am happy to make his acquaintance,' said Mme. de Guïonic.

Du Breuil had often spoken to her of Jacques as his best friend. The curtain rose, and disclosed a room of a palace. Alphonse was imploring Elvire's pardon, and, in a pathetic duo, obtained it. The scene was changed. Some young flower-girls danced on to the Place du Marché. M. de Prêcheur roused himself to find his opera-glasses. But the soldiers forcibly took La Mulette away. Masaniello urged on the people. 'Marchons! Aux armes! Des flambeaux!' Marie Sass at last appeared amidst the tumult of the last measures.

A thrill passed through the house, and cries and cheers mingled in a single acclamation at the sight of her. She wore a white tunic and a peplum, upon which was a pattern of golden bees. She advanced in that splendid tragic manner of hers, holding in her hand the tricolour flag. She commenced the first notes, 'Allons, enfants de la patrie,' in the midst of indescribable emotion.

The Duchesse de Mouchy rose to her feet, and part of the spectators imitated her example. Then an imperious voice—it was Emile de Girardin—cried: 'Everybody stand up!' The whole house obeyed. Each one felt possessed of a new, collective, and immense soul. Something strong and harsh, sudden, passed like a breath to the roots of their hair, to the marrow of their bones. The orchestra accompanied the glorious hymn. Marie Sass sang the first strophe in a trembling voice, calling up red blood and the flash of swords. Tremendous applause burst forth. She recommenced in a higher, louder key, and the song increased in volume, filled the enormous building, passed through the walls, and seemed to spread over Paris in revolt and the country in arms. In its ardent words the roll of cannon mingled with the clamour of the tocsin.

The feeling of the country in danger rose in every heart. The national anthem, for so long a time prohibited, appeared more beautiful, burnt with a new life and a flame eternal.

'Nous entrerons dans la carrière
Quand nos aînés n'y seront plus !'

Emotion was at its height. People panted with enthusiasm. Men and women became dizzy. The former laughed nervously and bit their moustaches, some shouted like madmen; the latter tore their fans to pieces and waved their handkerchiefs. The actress with her tragic eyes and mouth was then, white under her golden bees, the very incarnation of imperial France. Her stature increased, and, borne up by the universal delirium, she prophesied victory. Jena, Austerlitz, Sebastopol, and Solferino blazed out !

Du Breuil, transported, looked at his neighbours. Mme. le Prêcheur was leaning forward, completely carried away. Mme. de Guïonic turned towards him an exalted face, down which large tears were rolling. A frantic clamour drowned the finale. The whole house was traversed by one of those electric currents which galvanize a crowd and convert it into a single person. The people cried by a thousand mouths, in the midst of an irresistible outburst, the stamping of feet, arms raised on high, and faces drunk with joy: 'Long live the Emperor ! Long live France ! To Berlin !'

CHAPTER V.

THE train moved away.

'Good-bye, father,' said Du Breuil.

Motionless, he watched, with sinking heart, the last carriages as they vanished in the distance. The old officer was at one of the carriage doors, nodding his gray head, and smiling with an air of constraint. A moment before he had manfully embraced his son. The two men tried to assume an air of indifference, even of gaiety. Pierre promised to write. He hoped his mother would be reasonable; there was no reason for alarm; they were not separating for long. And soon he failed to distinguish the features of the old soldier—the smooth, shining forehead, the aquiline nose, the clear blue eyes. The

luggage-van, the only thing visible, sped over the shining rails, and, like a black point, quickly disappeared.

Then his feverish excitement subsided, and a sudden feeling of anguish caused a lump to rise in his throat, and overwhelmed his heart with bitterness. He realized with what deep affection he loved this father whom he saw so seldom, that mother hidden away in the old château. To think that he could not even kiss the sweet old lady on the forehead before leaving!

To leave for the war—the thought calmed his spirit. But his troubled sensations disappeared as quickly as they had come. To leave! What joy! what deliverance! In the confused state of things that prevailed at headquarters, would he have to submit to another counter-order? No; the service-letter had already been signed. His father's intervention and that of the Marquis de Champreux had been providential.

At first, the Chamberlain had done nothing for him. Fortunately, Comte du Breuil, unable to understand his son's inaction now that war had been declared, came to see him, and had also gone to Saint-Cloud to urge on the old beau. As it happened, a Council of Ministers was being held, and by great good luck the Count came across an old comrade, General Lebrun, Deputy-Commandant-General, who had set out for Metz on the 24th with Marshal Lebœuf, but had hastily returned. The mobilization of the army was far from being as well advanced as had been hoped. In consternation, the Marshal had despatched to the Minister of War *ad interim* his first Deputy-Commandant-General to insure prompt measures being taken. Comte du Breuil had asked his friend for an introduction to General Dejean. Thus, thanks to Lebrun's support, and at the instance of the Marquis de Champreux, he succeeded in getting his son appointed to the general army staff.

He met him at the entrance to the Ministry of War.

'You can pack your kit,' he said. That was all.

Pierre fell upon his neck and embraced him. They went immediately to dine with one of their oldest acquaintances, the well-known Jules Thédénat. This man had been Professor of History at the College of France at the time of the Revolution of 1848, but he had resigned after the *coup d'état*, and since then had spent a long time in travelling. In his self-imposed exile he had met Victor Hugo in Brussels and Quinet in Switzerland. He lived in great seclusion. Pierre looked upon him as eccentric.

Father Thédénat—that was the name he was given with sympathetic irreverence—was an old man with the face of an apostle: smooth-shaven, clear-cut, and full of energy. His snow-white hair, like that of a woman, was tied in a knot, and encircled his face. Comte du Breuil, who was out of all sympathy with his ideas, said laughingly: ‘He’s a furious Revolutionary.’ And thus they talked on in their usual animated and confidential way in the poor little dining-room of that humble and admirable creature, Mme. Thédénat, whose canaries flitted about in their cages overhead.

The old officer, who could use his remaining arm with great skill, held in his hand a short briarwood pipe, which he filled and lighted without help. He sent out quick, short puffs of smoke. Thédénat, as he listened, fixed his quick, bright-green eyes upon him. They talked of war and hoped-for alliances. There was no indication that the Austro-Hungarian army was to be mobilized. A letter received from Colonel de Brouillé, military attaché at Vienna (a letter of which General Lebrun was cognizant), removed all doubt as to the pacific intentions of Austria. Comte du Breuil related the remark made at Saint-Cloud on the previous evening by his old companion-in-arms. The Duc de Grammont, to whom the General communicated his apprehensions, said, tapping him lightly on the shoulder: ‘And you think Colonel de Brouillé knows all that is going on at Vienna? Come, come, man! Have confidence.’

Thédénat interrupted him impatiently.

‘Why should Austria help us? We cowardly abandoned her at Sadowa. Don’t tell me that it was Mexico that paralyzed our army, because we only had twenty-eight thousand men there—not a man more. And Hanover, Hesse, Nassau, Frankfort, and Sleswick, which we have allowed those Prussian dogs to swallow up. No, no; we will fight alone, and serve us right! All sins meet with retribution—those of nations as well as those of men.’

He continued with vivid and fiery words, in spite of the interruptions of the two Du Breuils, to attack the source itself of all this trouble, the Imperial Government, which he styled the personification of falsehood and rottenness, a paper empire, the work of gamblers and adventurers, based on luck and a fixed ideal, *l’Étoile*. He portrayed the Emperor, full of bold and visionary dreams, but shrinking from decisive action, indecisive and vacillating, a man living in a state of somnam-

bulism, in a dream of opium. How Bismarck had outplayed him, the inimitable actor, with his sullen face of a soldier-diplomatist hidden under the visor of his pointed helmet, and his mask of swaggering bombast. As for the Empress, Thédénat, although his language was respectful, was nevertheless severe. He detested her Spanish and clerical tendencies, and the political domination which she exercised over the Emperor. 'Both of them gamblers, both foreigners.'

He spoke with enthusiasm of Rochefort, and of Emile Ollivier with bitterness. He heaped scorn upon the shameful mockery of a Parliament; it was simply duping the people. The mass of the nation did not want war. For example, this famous *garde-mobile* could not be constituted. The deputies had only secured their election by promising to vote for peace. The plebiscite was a fraud.

He rose brusquely, and took from a drawer a picture which was being scattered broadcast by the million. At the head of one column was the word 'No,' underneath a pictorial representation of pillage—the burning of cottages and harvests; at the top of another, the word 'Yes,' with a pleasing picture of peace—barns overflowing with plenty, and cellars full of wine. The peasant had voted 'Yes,' for peace, and they had given him war.

Thédénat pointed out Prussia in arms, and all Germany at her back. In his rising excitement he expressed a fervent hope that a disaster was not near at hand. On that point, for instance, the Du Breuils differed profoundly from him. The father openly, the son silently, regarded him as a fanatic. Mme. Thédénat, her knitting in her hands, was silent; she listened with anxious suffering depicted on her drawn face.

'Pooh!' said the old officer; 'you won't discourage *him*.'

He pointed to the Major, who sat smiling incredulously. Thédénat hurriedly brushed back his beautiful white hair, which had fallen upon his temples. He filled up the glasses with some precious marc; then, holding his glass at arm's length, he said in a loud voice:

'Come, this time we will agree. To our native country.'

Father Thédénat passionately loved the Fatherland.

'This,' thought Du Breuil, 'atones for all.'

At the end of a fatiguing day, seated in his carriage, he could now laugh, buoyed up as he was by the excitement of departure. Escaping from his disordered apartment, where Frisch had heaped up a great pile of clothes and linen, he

resolved to make his final visits. This evening he would say good-bye to Mme. de Guïonic; to-morrow morning he would go to Saint-Cloud and thank his uncle; then he would take the train at the Eastern station, and on the following night he would be at Metz.

Was there anything that he had forgotten? If Frisch would only remember to get some nose-bags! He feared the effect of the heat on his two horses, Brutus and Cydalise, during the journey. With what a feeling of relief had he left the Ministry of War and shaken hands with Clémendot, who groaned continually over the rheumatism in his joints, which kept him tied to the office! He passed over in his mind the visits he had to make. First to his notary in the Rue de Provence. After going there he went to Devismes'.

When he reached the boulevard, his cab had to stop on account of the ever-increasing tumult of the mob. There was the noise of trumpets and drums. An old Colonel was mounted on a little black Barbary horse, which impatiently pawed the ground; behind him was the mounted staff. A regiment of the line filed past. In the rear file sergeants and sergeant-majors were keeping step. All were veterans, decorated with medals of the Crimean and of the Italian campaigns. Soldiers with gray moustaches could be seen in the ranks. Du Breuil admired their bearing. From front to rear the guns moved up and down at the same parallel angle. Their legs opened and shut like big red scissors; left arms were swung hither and thither like pendulums; every head was held bolt upright. An old sergeant cried to his platoon: 'Mark time!'

Mechanically the men stamped their feet, and then, at a sudden command, set off again in a body. The people applauded. A boy who had climbed into a tree lost his balance and fell among the spectators, without, however, doing himself injury. A bare-headed woman, carried away with joy, was sitting astride the shoulders of a workman, in whose curly hair she buried her hands to prevent herself from falling. The heat was oppressive; perspiration poured down the faces of the onlookers. Still the regiment filed past. Suddenly, when the 4th battalion was passing, a soldier fell like a lump of lead. The crowd pressed forward to raise him. An assistant medical officer got down from his horse and examined the prostrate body.

'Rupture of an aneurism. Nothing to be done.'

He remounted his animal and took his place again behind

the column. Some workmen carried the body towards a chemist's. The regiment continued on its way ; not a man had left the ranks ; hardly a comrade had turned his head. The red trousers moved away with the same rhythmical and inexorable step—One, two ! One, two !

'Pooh !' exclaimed a man with an evil countenance, looking at Du Breuil, 'he won't be the last.'

The carriage moved on. Further on a drunken man was sitting on a bench surrounded by idlers. His hat was crushed in and tilted over one eye. He made a motion that he wanted to speak. Salivating on to his beard, he vociferated :

'Down with Charles X. !'

He collapsed. The people laughed and pushed him about. A cuirassier, who was carrying a despatch, raised himself in his stirrups the better to see, and was very nearly thrown from his horse because of a dog which got between the animal's legs. At Devismes' Du Breuil was shown some revolvers of a new pattern, and purchased a perfected one. When leaving he thought of buying some maps of the Rhine country, but he asked himself if he wouldn't find as many as he wanted at Metz. Why burden himself ? He wanted a field-glass, however, so he purchased one. He almost forgot gloves.

'Cabman, Rue de Richelieu.'

He patronized a glove-shop, the proprietress of which was well-known for her amiability towards officers. She had in her employment a number of smart shop-girls. With many glances and little grimaces they pressed forward to serve Du Breuil, and one of them, a girl with auburn hair, black eyes, and a milky-white complexion, took his measure. The powder upon her face gave her such a sweet, fresh smell. Blushing, she tried him on a pair of gloves. While her companions were taking down boxes, they nudged her with their elbows, laughing to themselves. Du Breuil chose half a dozen pairs of strong buckskin gloves which would be soft to the reins and to a sword-handle. He also bought ten white pairs for use on the field of battle. He was flattered by the smile of the pretty auburn-haired girl ; she gave herself up to him in a look. He experienced a small and ridiculously vain pleasure, which passed away, however, outside, with the smoke of his cigarette.

Compliments were showered upon Du Breuil at his club. He shook hands with more than fifty comrades. Baron Lapoigne spoke a few warm, friendly words to him. But

when the first moment of curiosity was over, everybody went about his own little business, recommencing a game at cards which had been interrupted, or taking up a newspaper which had been laid down. Pierre remained in the clutches of old General de Castrée, who since 1857 had retired from the army. When eighteen years of age the General had gone through the French campaign. He had been a corporal at Champaubert, a Second Lieutenant at Waterloo, and his recollections of the imperial *épopée* were prolix in the extreme: the old hero shot forth a perfect torrent of words. Du Breuil had to put up with his eloquence until dinner-time.

His attention was occupied by several people, including Lapoigne and big Peyrode. He ate but little. Already his existence of the previous day seemed to him afar off; his neighbours, companions of many a fête, partners at play, seemed to him to have new faces to which he was indifferent. Even the toast which Peyrode energetically proposed, amid discreet applause, annoyed him. He drank his coffee without taking any pleasure in doing so, and then perceived, when his cigar was smoked, that people around him were in conversation. Nine o'clock already! Baron Lapoigne was keeping the bank. Pierre, standing up, staked his money on the left, and won several times in succession. When it came to his turn to be banker, he lost all his winnings, and £16 in addition. It was half-past nine o'clock. Mme. de Guëonic was awaiting him. He left the club without saying good-bye to anybody.

What vanity all this was! The war, to which he felt drawn as towards a precipice, again occupied his thoughts. Did these petty emotions of gambling, the pleasures of society, constitute life? At the proper hour war claimed both body and soul, and what an intense pleasure there was in the unforeseen and in dangers! The mask of propriety fell, and there stepped forth the primitive man struggling with craft, audacity and despair against his equals. He measured his strength with the elements and with destiny. Du Breuil recalled the terrible frenzies which he had experienced when his battery was destroying Magenta. Wounded, pale, clenching his teeth, the sight of his own blood had raised him up to so strong a feeling that he had wished to die that very instant, standing upright, under the sun. The heaps of bodies and the horror of the battle-field alone had called him to his senses. How pale was Deresse, his chief, and yet so admirably cool! With sorrowful gravity he saluted the wounded.

The carriage passed quickly towards Mme. de Guïonic's house, but never had he felt so far from her. He called up to mind the brief passions of the soldiers of the First Empire. In the interval between two battles they clasped their ladies in their arms. It was a rude period! Had they time even to know they were living? Ah, those who then pressed to their breast some loved one must have experienced intense and vivid happiness! Love and death were entwined in a smile. How he himself would have relished the exaltation of a similar departure! Pooh! . . . would he ever meet with absolute love, the love in which two souls mingled and made themselves one? Marriage dismayed him, notwithstanding the fine chances which had been held out to him. He could not resign himself to simply an association of interests; he thought with uneasiness of the case of Mme. de Guïonic, so tender and so proud. Poor friend!

The night was heavy. In spite of the lateness of the hour, there were a large number of people on the Place de la Concorde. Some artillery caissons were passing with a low, rumbling noise before the Corps Législatif. Horses and men had the appearance of being asleep. There were two mitrailleuses, their broad and short gun-barrels encased in leather coverings.

The carriage stopped in the Rue de Grenelle before the porch of a house of sombre appearance. At the bottom of the courtyard there filtered through the blinds the light of the lamps of Mme. de Guïonic's boudoir. She awaited him with anxiety. Du Breuil was touched by her pallor and the brightness of her eyes. He kissed her hand and sat down. The tone of the conversation was at first so natural that one would have thought he was setting out on the morrow upon some excursion. Ordinarily, the usages of society introduced something artificial into their sincerity. She only recovered herself little by little upon every fresh meeting. It was necessary for her to come under the fire of his eyes, and to hear vibrate the deeper tone of his voice. And especially at Mme. de Guïonic's how great was his power!

'You will be at Metz to-morrow night,' she said.

'And you,' he replied, 'will be at Lord Ramsey's ball?'

'Yes, if Mme. Sutton comes for me.'

'I shall think of you. What will be the colour of your dress?'

She would wear a skirt of gray and pink changeable silk, with bows of pearls and a ruby velvet bodice.

‘You will resemble one of Rubens’ princesses.’

What they were saying appeared to him poor and incomplete. Why was it so difficult to express his true thought? Kneeling before her, he would have liked to have murmured to her: ‘Dear friend, my dear friend, who have done me the honour to love me, I do not bring you a commonplace farewell! I am too conscious of my powerlessness to show my gratitude towards you—a gratitude which, however, is infinite. Your charming form has haunted my dreams and sleepless nights for years and years. In it I have adored the chaste and exquisite mistress which you have consented to become. You have, however, especially been a friend. . . . So inconstant and wretched is the heart of man! If I do not know how to love you better, at least, believe that recollection of you will sweeten the best years of my life. To forget you is impossible. I shall regret you the more for having lost you.’

He had an indistinct feeling that upon his return he would not find her as she was then, he would not find themselves as they were at that supreme minute.

‘You will be present at the Emperor’s departure?’ he asked.

‘No,’ she replied. ‘I dislike everything which smacks of curiosity and untimely zeal.’

He looked at her. Her rose-leaf, transparent eyelids drooped; her nostrils palpitated; her mouth opened like a living fruit. A subtle fire—her very soul, sorrowful and passionate—appeared in her face.

Du Breuil rose suddenly, and held towards her an envelope. She looked at it, but did not take it.

‘Your letters,’ he said. She did not at once understand the instinct of delicacy and prudence which had prompted him. ‘I bring them back to you, so that you may burn them,’ he added, lowering his voice.

She blushed. Her modesty, equalling her tenderness, was great and sensible. Her heart was troubled by everything which these letters called up. It seemed to her that by destroying them she would give material sanction to their separation, would consecrate the past. She felt that the present was so precarious and unstable, and to her also it was tinged with melancholy. She almost had the feeling of having committed a fault, or, worse still, an error, because she could not hide from herself the fact that Pierre loved her less than she loved him.

She did not take the letters, but merely said: ‘Not here.’

She passed into her bedroom. It was the second time that he had entered. He felt troubled. She lit a candle which she used when sealing her letters.

‘Give them to me,’ she said.

Then she set fire to the bundle and threw it into the fireplace. Little portions of them sprang out, burning, on to the carpet. She placed her foot upon them, and her skin appeared through her white stocking. She scattered the cinders with the point of her small shoe. It was as if they had burnt their love.

They now looked at each other fixedly, almost with hard gravity, and one would have said they had suddenly become strangers. Anguish was mingled with their silence, and the pendulum of the Saxony clock, with its loud tic-tac, prolonged the hopeless passing of life, and seemed to say: ‘Pa-st! pa-st! pa-st!’

‘Farewell, then,’ said Du Breuil.

‘Farewell,’ she repeated.

They tried to smile, but their smiles were such as those with which sick people are imposed upon. He opened his arms, and Mme. de Guëonic threw herself towards him. Claspings her to him, he buried his lips in her hair. She it was who first gently repulsed him. There was an expression of suffering on her face. Little by little, however, as he clasped her hands her features relaxed, and there came into her beautiful eyes a look of manly valour.

‘God protect you!’ she said.

There was the noise of something light which fell to the ground and broke. Du Breuil, grazing against a small table, had upset a jewel-tray. The opal bracelet had fallen to the ground.

‘Ah!’ she exclaimed, with an expression of sorrow.

He rushed forward to pick it up. One of the milky stones had become detached, by the shock, from its setting.

‘It is broken,’ he said. ‘How clumsy I am!’ Without knowing why, he added: ‘This opal will be of no use to you any more. Give it to me in remembrance of this minute. It shall never leave me.’

‘You know very well,’ she said, ‘that the opal brings misfortune.’

‘On the contrary, happiness,’ he replied, with an ardour which surprised even himself. He added: ‘I beg of you.’

She consented.

Their farewell was constrained. Was this the effect of the sorcery of the opal, or, rather, the feeling of that which they wished to say, which they had not said, which they would never say? However, their hands, joined for the last time, had a difficulty in unclasping.

'Farewell!' exclaimed Mme. de Guëonic abruptly.

Then it was that he left.

Outside, he painfully admitted that he felt as though a burden had been taken from his shoulders.

He rose at daybreak, classified his papers, and saw that his toilet-case was in order. At seven o'clock he left for Saint-Cloud. The surroundings of the palace were crowded with people; the large courtyard was encumbered with breaks and omnibuses waiting for the servants; coachmen and livery-servants rushed hither and thither. General officers of the staff, who were to accompany His Majesty, the Ministers, and the faithful of the Court, could be seen arriving.

Du Breuil had great difficulty in finding the Marquis de Champreux, who, although it did not come within his duties, was here, there, and everywhere in the forced disorder and agitation. A tall lackey had seen him pass; a butler affirmed that he was there a few minutes before. At last Du Breuil found him in an office, behind a partition, having a cup of chocolate.

'Ah, friend!' he exclaimed; 'you have no idea what a life I am having.'

He listened without paying much attention, replied in the same way, and, at bottom hostile to the war which was turning men and things upside down, always returned to the subject of the departure, the importance of which deranged his habits. He never lost a mouthful, but dipped large pieces of *brioche* into his chocolate, and then, slowly and steadily, swallowed them. He had the air of carrying out one of the important duties of his rank, just as upon days of ceremony, when dressed in his scarlet, gold-embroidered dress-coat, he related the latest news of the palace; that of Paris did not interest him.

The Chamberlain wiped his lips. An orderly officer ran past.

'Farewell, friend; I will see you after the Emperor's departure. You are coming to the station?'

In the courtyard Du Breuil found Lacoste, who was in full-dress uniform. Two platoons of Lancers of the Guard were on picket.

‘I saw you pass just now,’ said the Captain.

He was flushed over the cheek-bones, his eyes sparkled, and his hand was burning. In reply to Du Breuil’s anxious inquiry, he said:

‘A little enervated. I can’t sleep. Everybody’s going. Our regiment has set off, and here the Emperor is going to leave us. When do you rejoin your battalion?’

Upon learning that Du Breuil set off that very day he sighed.

‘I hope that at last our turn is coming. Those Badois scoundrels who have blown up the Kehl bridge! . . . The Emperor’s proclamation is mild; I should have liked something with more fire in it. But he is doing well to take his son with him.’

They had reached the private gardens. While breaks and family omnibuses were stationed in the Allée de la Carrière, imperial livery carriages and large open vis-à-vis were drawn up before the small apartments of the palace. Du Breuil picked out well-known faces—Jousset-Gournal, whose ubiquity was prodigious, and the publicist Favergues, very much surrounded by people. General Jaillant, who was accompanying the Emperor, was talking in the midst of a group of general officers. Mme. d’Avilar and Mme. Langlade had not missed the opportunity to pay their court; they were laughing with some old gentlemen with waxed imperials and red rosettes. They talked gradually louder and louder; then, recollecting the occasion, their faces became composed, and they spoke in a low tone.

The face of everybody was animated by the unique thought of the appearance of the Sovereigns. M. Jousset-Gournal, with sanctimonious smile and ears on the alert; Jaillant, with his eagle eye; and the zealous Mme. d’Avilar, watched the window-doors of the saloon through which their Majesties were to pass. . . . How many were there who thought of the Emperor’s departure after he had passed the gates? How many who followed him in heart? And how many would turn upon their heels, after the farewell had been uttered, only to think of themselves? . . . Was it caused by the wan daylight under the low sky? Du Breuil noticed on nearly everybody’s face a tired and heavy expression. High dignitaries, senators, and deputies appeared to be extinguished under the same satiated and fatigued mask. Comte Duclos alone retained his lordliness. Admiral La Véronnech was more

downcast than ever. Under the lights these people had seemed to him to be younger, fuller of life. He doubted if the Empire was growing old. He was soon smiling and calmed, however, when he saw the comings and goings of the Aides-de-camp, with their quick gestures and martial air. The calm and authority of the Generals in campaign dress filled him with great confidence, with instinctive respect. Lacoste's energetic face, full of devotion and will power, gave him pleasure. He thought of the redoubtable force which he had seen the other day on the threshold of the soldiers' dormitory at the barracks, and his heart was borne up by a great hope.

There was a movement of attention, and all eyes were directed to the Salon des Vernet at the end of the terrace. The Emperor, Empress, and Prince Imperial appeared. The Emperor wore the uniform of General-in-Chief, with crosses and medals. He was, as usual, grave, and he appeared to be suffering and extremely dejected. He searched for someone around him. Du Breuil momentarily met his indefinable look. An officer of the suite called for General Jaillant, to whom His Majesty spoke a few words. The Empress had never had a finer air, but her anguish was apparent. A mother's anxiety was the cause, it was supposed, of her nervousness. The Prince Imperial, standing at her side, his eyes red, his complexion animated, and a resolute look upon his face, looked at her with charming tenderness. He was wearing a uniform of a Grenadier of the Guard, a field-glass slung over his shoulder intersecting his tunic of a Second Lieutenant.

There was a great movement of carriages. The horses of the imperial equipage pawed the ground. Their Majesties led the way in an open carriage, and were followed by their households. Du Breuil, still accompanied by Lacoste, was with the Marquis de Champreux in one of the large vis-à-vis. Some Ministers and the high personnel of the palace got into the breaks and the omnibuses in the Allée de la Carrière. Those who could not find seats set out on foot. The cortège of carriages entered the main avenues under the shadow of the trees. Du Breuil thought of his own departure in the afternoon, and felt inspired with a manly joy. He experienced an inexpressible relief at the idea of being on the eve of entering into action.

Spectators were already in waiting near the small railway-station, which was situated on a branch of the circular railway

which entered the park. A thatched kiosk, ornamented with bronze lamps, served as a shelter. Everybody left the carriages. The Sovereigns stood on the platform surrounded by those on duty. Then the defile commenced. Those who were leaving paid homage to the Regent; the Emperor received the farewells of his Ministers; the Prince Imperial, very excited, went from one to the other. His pride got the better of his sorrow. His sword kept striking against his legs.

Du Breuil divided his attention between the various groups and the train drawn up on the line. The train consisted of a dozen carriages, communicating by an interior passage, painted dark green, with the exception of the carriage-terrace, which was of polished iron. Each of the panels was decorated with a gilded N, surmounted by the imperial crown. He admired the Beauvais tapestries, which could be seen through the saloon doorways. The bedroom—a voice remarked behind him—was lacking, but two ordinary carriages had been added in view of the numerous suite.

The Emperor gave the signal to get into the train. There was a confused uproar around the carriages of people rushing hither and thither. When he saw his staff he said, smiling :

‘It is a very army corps.’

The Empress was standing near the carriage-terrace, agitated and fevered.

It was a solemn moment. Dead silence reigned for a minute. Finally the whistle blew and the train moved off.

‘Do your duty, Louis!’ exclaimed the Empress, looking tenderly at her son.

More than one was moved by the scene. All heads were uncovered. There was a general cry of ‘Long live the Emperor!’

Du Breuil, with burning cheeks and full of hope, as though the first battle had been won, felt his soul go out towards Napoleon. The Emperor was leaning on the balustrade, his dull eyes fixed upon the Empress with a tender and sad expression. He remained there, motionless, until the train was on a level with the gateway which opened on to the main line. He then moved to the other side to salute the Montretout inhabitants who were cheering him.

Du Breuil, like everybody present, watched with agitation the train which, with its cortège of Generals, with the Emperor and his son, was disappearing in the full light, carrying towards the unknown the very destiny of the country, the fortune of France.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

'Pass the turkey to the doctor,' said M. Bersheim. 'There isn't his equal for carving.'

Everyone looked at M. Sohier, the surgeon of the Metz Military Hospital. He stuffed a corner of his napkin into the collar of his coat and took the large carving-knife in his hand. A fair-complexioned servant, with rosy cheeks, under the supervision of old Lisbeth, who had immediately recognised Du Breuil, received, with outstretched arms, the dish on which lay the large turkey, stuffed with truffles and browned to a nicety. M. Bersheim, with a joviality which accorded well with his rosy face, encircled by a gray beard, announced, with some little pride:

'She weighs fifteen pounds, General. The queen of my poultry-yard, brought to me yesterday from Noisseville by my tenant.'

General Boisjol, who was in the act of drinking a glass of wine, surveyed the bird with the air of a connoisseur. He resembled an old yellow wolf, with his large nose, short hair, and fierce looks.

'Now, just look!' exclaimed M. Bersheim enthusiastically.

The masterly skill with which M. Sohier carved was indeed worthy of admiration. The doctor smiled as he separated the joints; the pieces fell apparently of their own accord, and arranged themselves, as if by enchantment, around the dish. The mathematical precision of the carver disquieted Boisjol, and he expressed the thoughts of all by exclaiming:

'The devil! I shouldn't like to be under the doctor's knife.'

M. Sohier grinned with satisfaction. He had a high idea of surgery in general and of his own talents as an operator in

particular. There was nothing like the surgeon's knife! At the hospital he was called 'Coupe toujours' (always cutting). His manners were rough, but he was a good-hearted fellow. A close-shaven man with a skin like parchment and bright eyes, he carried his age remarkably well.

Boisjol continued in the same strain :

'You won't be without work, doctor.'

M. Sohier replied :

'The hospital is filling up. Nothing but simple accidents, it's true. They just brought to me an artilleryman who had had his foot smashed by a caisson. There are plenty of cases of dysentery, but no interesting ones yet.'

'You must have patience,' remarked Du Breuil.

Boisjol eyed him askance. He was nettled by Du Breuil's youth and his position on the staff. The General, proud of serving in the Guard, and as an old African Zouave who had gained his rank by regular promotion, despised educated officers. Du Breuil emptied his glass. The wine of the district, which they were drinking, was warm, dry, and had a strong aroma. The air was filled with the odour of truffles. The candelabra, which flanked each end of the table, cast a vivid glow upon the dark panels and the carved cupboards. The Major found everything, both men and things, just as he had left it fifteen years before. There was the same air of ease and comfort, the same family intimacy. A garland of roses, as of yore, adorned the table, and one of the four preserve-dishes contained preserved mirabelle plums. Mme. Bersheim, her eyes still as limpid as ever, listened to Father Desroques with a pleasant smile. The priest was one of the superiors of Saint-Clement's, an accomplished man of the world, with a handsome face, full of fire and energy. He was saying :

'It is said that the soldiers are irreligious ; but everywhere our Fathers are received with the most becoming respect ; they hear their confessions, and the men complain that they have not a sufficient number of chaplains. If we cannot serve them in that capacity, the school will at least have the honour of being transformed into an ambulance. Our pupils have recently been occupying their time in making lint. As soon as they are gone, the house will be made ready to receive the wounded.'

Old Lisbeth brought him a plate of spinach without any meat, which had been specially prepared for him on account of the day being Friday.

Sophia's grandmother nodded her head. She had not aged; she was still the same erect woman, carrying high that serene head upon which was the *bonnet à coques*. She said to the Father:

'We had news this morning from André and Maurice, and they are getting along well.'

'Two of our best pupils,' replied Father Desroques. 'They will do credit, I am sure, both to Saint-Clement and to the army.'

Du Breuil looked at Anine. She smiled proudly as she heard her brothers mentioned. Anine was no longer the frail little girl of old; her blue eyes and beautiful golden hair endowed her with a pensive beauty, a sedate charm. Silent, given to reflection, full of good sense withal, with pure and lofty ideas in her soul, she was indeed a child of Lorraine, a true daughter of Metz. A virginal grace set off her three-and-twenty years.

'Alas! my big boys,' sighed Mme. Bersheim.

She had need for all her Christian fortitude, for the peril her sons were running tortured her. André, a Lieutenant of Cuirassiers in the Duhesme division, and Maurice, a Sergeant-Major of Zouaves in the Ducrot division, had written from Strasburg, where Marshal MacMahon had just arrived.

'MacMahon!—there's the man for you!' cried Bersheim. 'As trusty as his sword. He'll sweep the ground for us.'

Du Breuil, who had arrived the night before, had commenced his duties the same day at headquarters. He was appointed to the manoeuvre department, under the orders of Colonel Laune. The Emperor had just forbidden MacMahon to make any move for a week. Du Breuil had copied the order. He confined himself to saying in reply that the Marshal's four divisions had just completed their organization. What he did not express was the discontent which he felt after working for an hour in the small room of the Hôtel de l'Europe, in the midst of unheard-of confusion and disorder. There were assembled there thirty officers, scribbling, laughing, chattering, amidst the noise of doors constantly opening and shutting, and the incessant to-and-fro movement of officers. He again noticed the delays and disarray in concentrating the army, the incapacity of the administrative departments, the feebleness of the effective forces, and the empty magazines. But this time, right in front of the enemy, it was indeed a serious matter.

'There's nothing to be done but to push forward,' said the optimistic Bersheim. 'But the interference of the Emperor in matters pertaining to the high command alarms me. All

these changes and delays are of no avail. They say that Bazaine is hurt at being reduced to the command of a simple corps.'

'Well, and what about the 2nd, the 4th, and the 5th Army Corps?' asked Boisjol. 'The Marshal superintended their formation up to the Commandant-General's arrival. . . .'

'Doubtless,' continued M. Bersheim, 'only you will admit that he didn't stay here for long. . . . His sudden departure was that of one discontented.'

'He returned to salute the Emperor,' remarked Mme. Bersheim.

Du Breuil made himself acquainted with the reception accorded the Sovereign. He recollected that Metz had voted in the negative at the time of the plebiscite. Bersheim gave an account of the arrival. Dark, thick-set detectives of Southern and Corsican types had been seen prowling about the Prefecture—the surroundings of which were strewn with sand—from five o'clock. At a quarter to seven the cortège had passed through the gate of the Rue Serpenoise, which was also strewn with sand, a fine rain having made the pavements slippery. The reception was indifferent and lacking in enthusiasm. For the past week the town had been decorated with flags, and not one flag had been added to the windows. A picket of one hundred Guards preceded the carriages, in the first of which was seated the Emperor, visibly broken down. His head had fallen upon his breast, and his long hair extended from under his képi down to the collar of his coat. In the second carriage, by the side of the impassive Prince Napoléon, was the Prince Imperial, saluting and smiling.

'I heard a peasant murmur,' said M. Bersheim, '"One of them is too young, and the other is too old."' He added: 'Bazaine, alone, in an open calèche followed in the midst of the cortège of Generals, equerries, and outriders. He was very pale, his eyes were swollen, there were wrinkles upon his face, and he had a careworn and tired look. I must confess he didn't produce upon me a very excellent impression. There was something impenetrable in his face—the expression of a man who is thinking of himself.'

'An ambitious man,' added the doctor. 'His conduct in Mexico showed it.'

'It's possible,' said Boisjol. 'I don't know anything about it, but he's as brave as they make 'em. I knew him in Italy.'

Somebody came and told M. Sohier that an infirmary

attendant was waiting to see him. He left the table, and did not return. Lisbeth said he went off in a furious state. An officer had just put a bullet in his head.

'Such misfortunes must happily be rare,' said Mme. Bersheim, moved to pity.

Boisjol, again helping himself to asparagus, replied :

'It is true that the officer has a higher conception of duty than the common soldier, but suicides among the rank and file are common. More than one blow out their brains when a comrade, worn out by fatigue, marching continually under the sun, sets them the example. Examples came under my notice in Africa.'

A look of sadness came into the ardent face of Father Desroques.

'It is terrible!' sighed a lady, Mme. Le Martrois, who up to the present had said nothing. Her eyes were centred upon her son Gustave, a tall, awkward, bearded youth in spectacles.

'The reason for that,' said the General philosophically, 'is that the soldier's equipment when campaigning is too heavy.'

'Speaking of equipments,' resumed M. Dumaine, a stout old gentleman of independent means, with a fresh complexion, benevolent eyes and smile, 'the scene at the railway-station at the present time is unbelievable. Never have I seen so many kits and luggage. The wholly inadequate staff are at their wits' end, the warehouses are obstructed, and the confusion increases daily. Everybody is giving orders. The company, notwithstanding its willingness, doesn't know to whom to listen.'

'Nothing is astonishing with such an organization,' explained M. Bersheim.

Regiments had arrived pell-mell from the very first. The floating mass of isolated soldiers had been placed on the railways. The disorder had commenced at the landing-place, owing to the foreseen division of the troops. The trains were packed. Luggage remained unclaimed. At the same time there flowed in the consignments of *matériel* and rations, which the territorial commissariat unfortunately had had no orders to receive. As to the divisionary commissariat attached to the army corps, and in ignorance as to whether the army would break the journey at Metz or not, it had not dared to empty the trucks which, in long files, were encumbering the railway sidings. The company's employés passed their time in receiving the consignments, transmitting them to the com-

missariat, to the artillery, to the engineers, and to the arsenal. Forthwith coffee had to be delivered to one, cartridges to another, and flour to a third. Very often drays carried goods to a great distance—goods which, after being unloaded, were placed on the drays again, and taken back to the trucks, whence they were again transported. Trains still continued to arrive, however, from the four corners of France, and in the end the company was driven to piling the goods on the platform.

Mme. Le Martrois confided to Father Desroques that she had seen the Prince Imperial during the morning. He was on horseback, and had a numerous military suite. Some boys ran behind and cheered. Handfuls of half-pence were thrown to them.

Gustave Le Martrois said timidly :

‘I saw two German dragoons taken to the Hôtel de Metz, where the chief Provost holds his court. They looked very cunning, and they held themselves as stiff as stakes in their short coats.’

‘I saw a spy, disguised as a woman, being led away,’ said M. Dumaine. ‘The crowd was hooting him. It appears the number of spies the Prussians employ is incredible.’

‘Yes,’ said Du Breuil; ‘that department is perfectly organized with them.’

On the other hand, we knew nothing precisely. The collecting of troops at Mayence, Winden, Maxau, and Carlsruhe was reported; but the composition of the German armies and their plans remained unknown. . . . Notwithstanding the prescriptions of the Commandant-General, who had ordered patrols, reconnoitring parties, and cavalry deviations, the forces had not come into collision. We were facing an enemy which, though present, remained invisible. Impatience and doubt were kept alive by a few unimportant skirmishes, the capture of some Uhlans, and shots fired by outposts.

‘All the same,’ said M. Bersheim returning to his idea, which, at heart, was everybody else’s, ‘why don’t they move? I’m not a soldier, but it seems to me that expectation is contrary to the French temperament. It is true a Colonel of the staff told me they had no biscuit to take with them. Lebœuf telegraphed to Paris yesterday to send some here and to Strasburg; but, hang it all! there is bread and corn in Germany. What are they waiting for?’

Boisjol did not reply. He had a feeling that his adventurous courage of an old African campaigner was slighted; he

grumbled at being kept waiting, sword in hand. When people declared war, it meant they were ready, and when they were ready it was time to march.

After a special kind of plum-tart, for which the household was famed, dessert was concluded. Lisbeth, in accordance with custom, placed the liqueur-case on the table, and M. Bersheim opened it. The square glass bottles, ornamented with gold, the colour of topaz, ruby, and emerald, were half full of brandy, curaçao, *crème d'angélique*, and a fourth with old Black Forest kirsch, limpid as water, ardent as fire.

'I can recommend it,' said M. Bersheim.

Du Breuil accepted a glass. Undoubtedly nothing had changed. The old residence retained its air of calm happiness. In the carved case of the tall kitchen clock the pendulum, a disc of copper, marked time with a regular, pulse-like beat, swinging backwards and forwards, alternately revealing and hiding from view the motto in black enamel: 'Omnes vulnerant, ultima necat.' Du Breuil would have a difficulty soon in leaving this peaceful place. Mme. Bersheim's smile and Anine's clear look went straight to his heart. He remembered this tall young lady when she was a child in short dresses, and even then she had a serious forehead. She loved to read pretty stories in picture-books, and D'Avol used to comment on them with much animation and comic invention. Once more he saw before him the two brothers—the robust André and the somewhat pale Maurice—the one rowdy, undisciplined; the other taciturn and somewhat sly. . . . As they were passing into the drawing-room the clock struck. It had a grave, deep, and solemn note, which used to make D'Avol laugh when it inflexibly hammered out the hour for returning to the school. One would have sworn, he used to affirm, that it was the voice of the professor of military art and of geodesy. Good old Jacques! As M. Bersheim had remarked, before sitting down to table, he would miss being there that evening. He had arrived two days before, and was bivouacking at the Polygone; he had been prevented by his duties from attending the gathering. Bersheim had hardly shaken him by the hand. His visit to the Guards' camp had filled him with enthusiasm.

'What soldiers!' he exclaimed. 'And Bourbaki, what a leader! Come, come! I've good hope. What, friend, going already?'

Du Breuil excused himself on the ground of pressing work. General Boisjol sharply nodded his head. He wholly blamed

the staff for the slowness and disorder of the movements ; and when the door had closed behind the Major, he explained matters with bitterness.

Du Breuil crossed the courtyard, and passed through the porch with fluted columns, still surmounted by their stone balls overgrown with green. He imagined he had gone back fifteen years, when he was a pupil Second Lieutenant, with hardly a shadow of a moustache upon his lip. . . . No more general headquarters, no more work, and no war ahead. Just as though he were going to enter the École d'Application, he passed along the Rue aux Ours. It was a singular sensation to find himself, almost the same person, at the point from which he had set out. He seemed to know every gable and black corner—everything, down to the unequal quartz paving-stones, which under his heel revived a familiar contact. Notwithstanding the dark lane, Metz rose up in all its antique grace of a provincial town, with its buildings painted yellow ochre ; the slightly overhanging mud roofs of the houses ; its bridges, its squares, its quincunx ; and, dominating the stretch of house-tops, the mighty pile of the cathedral, like a shepherd watching over his sheep. Parcelled out by the lusty waters of the Seille and the Moselle, full of barracks, shops, arsenals, and schools, he saw once more the old military town in its entirety, narrowly enclosed in its belt of fortifications and grassy dykes. Was Metz la Pucelle sufficiently proud of this corset with lace of stone ? She defied all attack, and the countryside was reached only by way of mistrustful drawbridges and narrow prison doors.

He passed before the school where two of the best years of his youth had been spent. Several drunken troopers passed with stumbling step and a great clanking of swords. At the corner of the Rue de la Garde the sobbing of a child behind a window made him turn his head. Near the Palais de Justice a patrol passed him. A fresher air blew upon his face. He skirted the Esplanade. . . . Formerly so calm at the hour when the *petite cloche* was going to be sounded, it was now animated in the feeble light from the gas-lamps, which were placed at intervals under the trees, by the to-and-fro motion of shadows. Other soldiers, worn out by fatigue, were sleeping on the ground, with their heads upon their knapsacks ; a white cat darted under the bottom of a door ; there was the rumbling of carts in the distance ; then, in the Rue des Clercs, the heaviness of the atmosphere oppressed him—an atmosphere saturated with the life and silence of these thousands of men

and horses camping in all directions, filling the forts, the barracks, the glacis, the Ban Saint-Martin, and the Île Chambière, the ground dotted with gray tents, and the grass blackened by innumerable camp-fires.

At the Hôtel de l'Europe were sentinels, many lights, and much noise, and in the room of the general headquarters, the windows of which were open, were officers bending over papers in the midst of clouds of tobacco-smoke. Du Breuil entered. Two fashionably-dressed ladies smiled at him on the threshold. One was the General's wife, who was stopping there with her lady and nurse as though in the country for a holiday. Some orderlies and inquisitive people were in one of the lobbies. A journalist, who had applied to Du Breuil during the afternoon for information, barred his passage. He was wearing a complete suit of clothes, a Tyrolese hat, and patent-leather shoes. In his hand was a carpet bag.

'Only too happy to give up my room to you, Major. I leave for Boulay. Nothing is known here, and I'm longing to learn something. What is being done? What are they waiting for?'

He was a man with a long, clown-like face, and his manner was bantering. He slightly shrugged his shoulders. Du Breuil saw from his sparkling eyes that he had been dining too well.

'I respect the secret of armies, Major! But journalists are not in favour. Everything is kept from us. I've been twice arrested as a spy. . . . Now, between ourselves, how is it nothing is known? Perhaps you gentlemen don't know any more yourselves—'

The lobby door opened, and Major Blache appeared. As the orderly officer of Marshal Lebœuf, he was constantly in communication with the general staff. The journalist, whom he had snubbed a few minutes before, stammered out :

'Glad to see you, Major!'

He saluted coldly, and Du Breuil saw the journalist slink away with the gliding step of the rope-dancer, his carpet bag hand.

'You were speaking to that clown?' growled the Wild Boar. 'The first journalist who comes bothering me I shall throw through the window—chatterers that they are!'

He had been in a state of anger for three days. The only words which he had had in his mouth were, 'A regular mess—a regular mess!' and these words had been repeated over and again with a fury which was really comic. Everything was

going wrong. He was in a room swarming with bugs ; some of his young comrades had been wanting in respect ; and one of his horses had been injured during the journey. Moreover, being a man of method, he could not reconcile himself to the uproar in the workroom, to the presence there of strangers, who entered as though into the common room of an inn. The same agitation and looseness of action reigned in the four departments of the general headquarters, namely, the information, movement, personnel and *matériel* departments. The smallest telegraphic despatch was sufficient to throw everybody into a state of excitement. People had the air of those who are troubled by hallucinations.

‘Great Jupiter! let’s be calm,’ he growled twenty times a day.

They entered the room, where the uproar was on the increase.

‘Du Breuil,’ said Colonel Laune, ‘I’ve got some work for you.’

The Colonel was slenderer and dryer than ever, and on the stretch like a steel bow. He was one of those rare men who, in spite of work, retain their lucidity, promptness, and decision. Heads were raised. Major Décherac, a friendly fellow, shook Du Breuil by the hand. Several officers smiled at him in recognition. Others didn’t move an inch. A look of envy came into the white, sickly, sardonic face of Captain Floppe.

‘Here! write me out this report,’ said Laune, lowering his voice. ‘General Lebrun is waiting for it.’

Du Breuil settled down to work. On his right a spectacled, gray-haired, barrel-bellied Lieutenant-Colonel, with very little of the soldier about him, was trimming a quill pen with extraordinary attention. Facing him was Major Kelm, one of his comrades in Mexico, who was writing at a furious pace, biting his moustache the while. When, every now and then, Du Breuil raised his head, he met at the other end of the room the serious look of an officer named Restaud, who was unknown to him, but whose intelligent ugliness awoke in him a commencement of sympathy.

The heat was stifling. A waiter entered carrying some mugs of beer on a tray. He had to return with others. One officer called for ice, and another for lemonade, and as Du Breuil once more plunged into his work the tall, very tall, Colonel Charlys, chief of the information department, came to confer with Laune a couple of feet away. They talked loud enough to be heard.

‘Really, it was insupportable!’ Charlys was saying. His bony face reminded one of Don Quixote. ‘Nine times out of ten, information was transmitted to the Emperor and to Marshal Lebœuf by secret agents. The staff was thus ignorant of everything concerning the general policy and the reason for operations. The espionage staff was insignificant. Consequently, the daily information sheet, made up of particulars at second-hand and those furnished each day by the commanders of the corps, didn’t mention a single important fact.’

Colonel Laune, in reply to these grievances, said it was the same with certain movement orders, which, given directly by the Emperor or the Major-General, never came to the knowledge of the offices. Both men complained of these irregularities. What was wanted was a single management, a guiding will.

‘Our duty,’ resumed Colonel Charlys, ‘should not be reduced to actual service and writing. If we don’t know by what considerations and news the orders which we transmit are justified, our rôle is diminished. The whole army may suffer from it——’

On the advice of Laune he lowered his voice.

Du Breuil, hearing nothing more, resumed work upon his report. Yes; this division of authority had many inconveniences. The Emperor? He doubtless had some plan in view, but the indecision of his character, the disquietude which the disarray of the army, so slow in fitting itself out, inspired in him, paralyzed his mind, which at the best of times was prone to procrastination. . . . The command was in the hands of the Sovereign, the Commandant-General, and the Deputy-Commandant-General. It was felt that what was lacking was a vigorous impulse. Hardly had Du Breuil arrived than he saw the state of uncertainty and confusion which reigned. They were actually only completing the equipment and the armament! And while the magazines at Metz were emptying, considerable ordnance stores were being collected at Forbach and at Sarreguemines—towns which, being in proximity to the enemy, were open to their attack. To lighten the troops they had been relieved of their blankets and shakos; on the other hand, other men had received the additional burden of ninety cartridges. . . . The Guard had put off their bearskin caps, and would go through the campaign in foraging caps. It had needed nothing less than one day to arrange that, and three different orders and counter-orders had

been given. . . . When Du Breuil came to matters of detail, he was simply stupefied! Whatever the Minister might say in the Chamber, everything was wanting. There were no campaign-ovens, utensils, or camp effects; no tents, or pans, or soldiers' mugs, or bowls; no infirmary attendants or administration employés; no medicine-chests, or stretchers, or cacolets*; and no harness. And, in spite of the fine bearing of the old regiments, what stragglers, pillagers, and drunkards there were!

He passed over in mind the journey from Paris to Metz, and saw again the stations crammed with soldiers; trains, packed to overflowing, in the sidings; again heard the cries and the songs and the tumult. At Vitry an officer was unable to obtain obedience. At Châlons some Zouaves were dancing a farandole to the sound of a blatant corneopean! . . . Then, the arrival in the gray dawn, the pell-mell of bivouacs and camps, the glacis crowded with tents, piles of arms and canteen carriages; soldiers of different regiments, horses on picket, the silent mouths of the cannon drawn up in parks, the caissons, the carriages, and the immense river of men which had flowed there over a thousand routes of France. And suspended over this stagnant army was the vision of carnage, the impression of enervation and waiting. Du Breuil recalled the evening at Saint-Cloud; the 'Marseillaise' at the Opéra. . . . That was the prelude. The drama was now about to commence. In the feverish impatience which made his pen scratch over the paper it seemed to him that the actors had missed their entry. . . .

Ah, what a relief it would be to hear the report of the first cannon!

CHAPTER II.

Two days afterwards he took advantage of a moment's freedom to rejoin D'Avol at the Café Parisien. His heart was overjoyed at the news which he had just heard. At last, then, they were going to move; a grand operation on Sarrebrück was imminent. He walked as fast as he could.

* Originally a basket for carrying travellers or wounded persons on the backs of mules. The word here refers to a special kind of ambulance used in the French army. It was made of triangles of iron rods, which were covered with cloth bands to give elasticity.—F. L.

The Place de la Comédie was covered with soldiers, bourgeois, and peasants in their Sunday dress. The whole length of the parapet facing the old houses, which dipped their feet into the waters of the Moselle, upon the bridge, under the lime-trees in quincunx—everywhere, in fact—was a medley of uniforms, and loungers walking about with an air of amusement. Admiration was centred preferably upon the fine uniform of the Guard, the white galloons on the uniforms of the Grenadiers, the yellow on those of the Light Infantry, the Tunisian cap of the Zouaves, audaciously tilted over on to the nape of the neck, and the light green cloth coats of the Empress's Dragoons. A carabineer, who passed at a trot, made quite a sensation with his sky-blue tunic and shining copper breastplate. His horse reared, and an old woman had a narrow escape from being crushed.

Du Breuil's attention was momentarily drawn to some officers, whose faces he thought he knew. There were so many faces, and all marked with the same professional wrinkle. He had been perplexed for the past three days by this crowd of anonymous faces. Certain of them, however, he remarked; an attitude, gesture, or physiognomy lingered in his mind. Some of them still retained their affectations, shaving themselves each morning, wearing their moustache and imperial; others had let their beard grow. But he noticed in the case of nearly every one a kind of negligence, unceremoniousness, as though they had returned to an instinctive, animal life of freedom. . . . Comrades were voracious, thirsts were unquenchable at the café, and there was more familiarity in the midst of their everyday life together.

Not a seat was vacant at the small tables of the Café Parisien. The terrace, ornamented with bay-trees in boxes, swarmed with uniforms. He recognised General Boisjol, in campaign uniform, with high yellow boots; his comrade, Décherac, of the staff; Captain Laprune, of the Dragoons; and Colonel Maisonval. Some journalists in eccentric dress—one had on a suit of black velvet, another was dressed like a brigand in an operetta—were mingled among the groups. People were looking askance at a tall, red-headed young fellow with prominent jaw-bones, the correspondent of the *London Gazette*. He was boasting of being perfectly *au courant* with what was going on in the offices. His less fortunate *confrère* of the *Standard* had been imprisoned.

Du Breuil noticed the proboscidian gravity with which a

Captain of gendarmerie, a man with an enormous nose, carried a *petit-verre* to his mouth; the circular motion of his arm reminded one somewhat of the movement of an elephant's trunk. A commissary of stores was conversing with a hairy gorilla of a man, a member of the International Society for Succouring the Wounded, upon whose cap and the band round his arm was a red cross upon a white ground. A group quite apart was composed of Post-Office employés in green and silver uniforms, with stripes over all the seams. Above the din of conversation could be heard the stentorian voice of Major Couchorte, of the Cuirassiers of the Guard, a Celtic giant, resplendent with steel.

Du Breuil at last discovered D'Avol.

'Do you know these gentlemen?' he said. 'Captain de Serres and Lieutenant Thomas, belonging to my first battery.'

Salutes were exchanged, hands were clasped, and glasses of beer were drunk.

'Well, member of the staff,' said D'Avol, 'do you bring us the order to move? I'm inclined to think so, judging from the mysterious air which you all wear to-day. Just look at this spectacled Colonel to the left. One would think he had swallowed his tongue.'

Du Breuil recognised Lieutenant-Colonel Poterin, his neighbour of the workroom at the Hôtel de l'Europe. His notebook was open before him, and this time he was in the act of sharpening a pencil. Was he always sharpening a pencil or trimming a quill pen?

'Really, this uncertainty *is* irritating!' exclaimed Captain de Serres, a very handsome, almost too handsome a fellow: it was said he wore stays. 'We know nothing of the Germans; but they, informed by journalists, know everything, even to the position of our troops. Come now, Major, isn't it absurd?'

Upon hearing this embarrassing question, Lieutenant Thomas—his moustache consisted of only a couple of hairs—turned away his head out of hierarchical respect, and commenced to rub the inflamed corner of his eyelid.

'And what of that?' exclaimed D'Avol. 'In the days of the Other that didn't lengthen out matters. You recollect the withering campaign of 1806. The Prussian monarchy was demolished in seventeen days.'

'There are different men at different periods,' exclaimed Du Breuil.

'No, no,' replied D'Avol. 'Men change but little. They

are what they are made. One can say with certainty: Like Captain, like army.'

'If we don't move,' exclaimed Captain de Serres, 'was it really worth while distributing to us so many maps of Germany—whole piles of them? I hope that we haven't to pass through all the districts they contain.'

'In the meanwhile maps of the frontier are wanting,' remarked D'Avol. 'Impossible to get them. Have you one, gentlemen?'

The three officers answered in the negative. At the neighbouring tables there was the sound of rising voices:

'There is not a single map in Metz!'

'Not a library possesses one!'

'What is the war dépôt thinking about?'

D'Avol lowered his voice, and, turning towards Du Breuil, said:

'Just now, when I was waiting for you, I saw that old Colonel of Dragoons gravely unfold his map. Do you know what he said to the Captain who accompanies him?' Du Breuil recognised La Maisonval and Captain Lapruné. "'Isn't this the Rhine which passes Sarrelouis?" And the Captain replied: "I beg your pardon, Colonel, it is the Moselle."'

The loud voice of Major Couchorte was heard. He appeared to be angry. In front of him was seated an acute-minded, dark-complexioned, small-statured Light Infantry Captain. He looked like a gnat annoying a lion.

'Leave me in peace,' clamoured the giant. 'What stuff and nonsense all this talk about the range and accuracy of your Prussian guns! Do you think all the balls and bullets in the world are equal to a fine cavalry charge? Our tactic, Captain, is to form into large, compact masses, to open out and then to charge. And a devilish good tactic too, as was shown at the Moskova and at Waterloo.'

'However, Major, I'll undertake to say that Marshal Niel in his "*Observations sur le Service de la Cavalerie en Campagne*," expounds different principles, and ones more in accordance with the destructive progress of firearms. The reconnoitring of columns, connecting them, harassing the enemy, and then, when the battle is about to start, off like the wind to be on the watch. . . .'

'Marshal Niel is out of date!' cried Couchorte. 'Marshal Lebœuf very quickly did away with that instruction. No, sir,

cavalry is a first-rate fighting tool. We are there to give the decisive blow of the battle; we are the iron corner which forces its way forward and destroys everything. To charge and sabre right and left is the only thing I know.'

The Dragoons approved of what he said. Old Colonel La Maisonval twirled his moustache between his powerful fingers. Captain Laprune gave forth a laugh under his helmet, with its horse's tail, which resembled the neigh of a horse. The infantrymen discreetly shrugged their shoulders.

From the adjoining table came complaints about the commissariat.

'The Emperor is very displeased with it,' Lieutenant Marquis, a Light Infantry officer, was saying gravely. He was always full of news, whether it was true or not. He had large round eyes, his hair was untidy, and his air was at once foolish and important. 'We met His Majesty this morning when returning from a military march, and, notwithstanding our cheers, his face remained cold. It appeared he had just been doing execution among the commissariat officials. It is also said that he is furious with the state of the forts——'

'It is evident,' resumed D'Avol, 'that many things are not progressing, but if we are to wait until we lack neither a mug nor a biscuit, the Prussians will have a fine time. . . . Hallo, Barrus!' he exclaimed, catching sight of an officer of the garrison, a captain in the Engineers. 'He will explain to us the reason for the delay in arming the forts.'

The new arrival answered bitterly:

'It is a question of money, Major.'

Captain Barrus—small, dark, the possessor of an intelligent face, a sectarian forehead, and a dark, fiery gleam in his eyes—added:

'Yes, the budget of war and the defence of towns—all those things are mere nonsense . . . while a ball at the Tuileries, and a splendid income for the Master of the Hounds, one hundred thousand francs here and one hundred thousand francs there—those things are all right.'

He summed up the situation. Four works in course of construction were to be added to the two forts—namely, Moselle and Bellecroix—which flanked Metz on the north-east and on the north-west. These were Plappeville and Saint-Quentin on the left bank, Queuleu and Saint-Julien on the right bank. The first two were the most advanced; the only thing that had to be done was to cover the remblais and parapets with earth.

On the other hand, there remained much to be done to forts Queuleu and Saint-Julien, which were large bastioned pentagons, still open at the gorge. But the unprotected parts of the escarps were being hurriedly stockaded, and the breaches were being barred by means of strong blinds. The armament was being completed tolerably well. As a matter of fact, the number of guns unlimbered was insufficient. . . . A new fort (that of Saint-Privat), which was intended to protect the railway and the station, had been commenced in May, but it was hardly finished. As to works of minor importance, intended to connect the system of forts, they only existed on paper.

‘It’s all the same,’ he continued, with that acrimony which opponents of the Empire manifested; ‘one has only to take the offensive, and the condition of the forts will be a matter for less disquietude. Unfortunately, yesterday’s proclamation isn’t one which shows a strong will. What is: “To defend the honour and the Fatherland”? Are we, then, threatened with invasion? What is the meaning of: “Whatever route we follow beyond our frontiers”? We don’t know, then, yet which to choose? And it concludes with Bossuet’s “Dieu des Armées,” with the freshness taken off.’

He added:

‘That is not the way men are roused.’

‘Pooh! words—mere words!’ exclaimed D’Avol. ‘We’re only talking to kill time. Let the signal to saddle be given, and you will see.’

Captain de Serres gave a cruel laugh.

‘My orderly was still busy sharpening my sword this morning. I said to him: “The point in preference. The edge wounds, but the point kills.”’

Couchorte cried:

‘The sword—there is nothing like the sword! It is the very first of arms. When on the gallop, with one’s blade securely fixed to the wrist, one can go through one’s man as though he were butter.’

More than one agitated his sword-knot at the murderous vision. Over certain faces there passed a hard expression. Even among the group of Post-Office employés there were bellicose smiles. All looked brilliant in their fresh green uniforms, and were filled with self-sufficiency, which was, perhaps, only embarrassment. One of them even complacently assured himself that his sword was loose in its scabbard. The action attracted Captain Lapruné’s attention.

'Sir,' said he, with jeering politeness, 'you have placed the hilt wrong way round.'

The employé slightly reddened.

'Sir,' continued Laprune, with the same coldness, 'your spurs are buckled on upside down.'

The man became scarlet. There was laughter around him, and his comrades cowardly joined in. But their prestige was damaged.

D'Avol considered Couchorte was making himself ridiculous. He growled in a low voice:

'A fine fellow that! Let him try to spit shells and cleave bullets with his larding-knife and he'll see! . . . Are you off already, Pierre? I'll come with you.'

He paid for the drinks, and said good-bye to his comrades. When leaving, they passed by the side of Lieutenant Marquis. The chatterer was holding forth in the midst of a circle of attentive listeners, tracing campaign plans on the marble table with a match dipped in coffee.

The two friends walked for a moment in silence.

'I'm going to Père Gugl's,' said Du Breuil. 'Do you remember him—the Jew watchmaker? When I say Père, I really mean the son, who has succeeded him. But the resemblance is astonishing. He has quite the air of the old man.'

'Père Gugl,' said D'Avol, 'who used to lend us money when we were at the school at fifty per cent? Old thief!'

'Yes, but a very clever jeweller. I want this stone set in a ring.'

Du Breuil showed Mme. de Guïonic's opal.

'It is cracked, isn't it?' said D'Avol.

'I shall keep it, all the same.'

Jacques did not ask for an explanation, doubtless remembering the opal bracelet. He had admired Mme. de Guïonic's slender wrist in the box at the Opéra. Du Breuil was astonished to feel how far off that recollection was. It was only four days since he had left her, but it seemed almost four months.

Gugl's shop was half open, half closed.

His eye blinked—that single eye with which the Jew scrutinized the officers, for he was blind of one eye, like his father, since birth. He cast an anxious look in the direction of his wife, who, wrapped in a cashmere, wore black silk bands upon her head and forehead to do duty for hair. She immediately left them. A Jew-like smell issued from the small, dark

room. In the shop-window, behind a dirty glass, were some old broken watches and small bric-à-brac.

‘Well, Gugl, don’t you recognise me?’ asked Du Breuil. He had to refresh his memory.

The Jew, who was pulling at his forked beard with a perplexed air, raised his hands. He had seen so many pupils of the school—goot young men! But *trate vas not goot*. Ah, Got of Israel! *trate vas very pat*. . . .

‘Reassure yourself, Gugl; I don’t want to borrow any of your money. Can you show me some old rings?’

‘Beautiful rinks? Goot rinks?’

He hesitated, with anxious air, to call his better half. He decided to do so, however, as though he had a fear for the dusty treasures in his shop-window. The venerable matron arrived, dragging with her two untidy children—almost albinos, they were so fair. Gugl, reassured, disappeared in a corner, which was hidden by a tattered hanging, and returned with some rings of pale chased gold. Du Breuil was a long time in making a choice and in beating down the price. He finally decided to purchase a foliated ring, the empty bezel of which was just the size of his opal. D’Avol was getting impatient. When Du Breuil had been conducted to the door, amid the blessings of the Israelite and his wife, and was outside, D’Avol said:

‘Frankly, do you know anything? What is our position?’

Du Breuil smiled.

‘Strictly in confidence, eh? Well, a grand movement upon Sarrebrück is being prepared. The Emperor heard yesterday that the Prussians were advancing from that side. There was some talk of forty thousand men. It is, therefore, an urgent matter, and under these circumstances the 3rd and 5th corps will support the 2nd. Bazaine will direct the attack.’

‘Bravo!’ exclaimed D’Avol, his eyes sparkling with pleasure. ‘And the Guard?’

‘The Guard remains at Metz.’

D’Avol stifled an oath. His face was contracted almost maliciously.

‘At Metz? And what shall *we* do while the others are fighting? Go fishing?’

‘Be patient; there will be more than one change. The last word hasn’t been said. Come as far as the hotel, and we may perhaps learn more.’

D'Avol was raging :

'It doesn't matter, but I would willingly have fired the first cannon-shot.'

Du Breuil imagined, almost heard, that first report. There was a deafening crash, the great plaintive whistling of the shell, the bursting in all directions in the midst of a group of Germans. There were cries, a stomach ripped open and a head shattered. That was what everybody eagerly and joyously wished. He saw himself in a flash carrying orders. . . . He was surrounded ; he was striking right and left with his sword. . . . Suddenly an unknown face beset him—a red face with hard blue eyes and tawny beard ; an anonymous face, which to him was the face of the Enemy. He thought of Baron Hacks, of his haughty politeness, of the Exhibition, and of the hours they had passed together. What would he feel if he met him in a *mêlée* ? . . . Nothing new was known at headquarters. The Guard was not going to move.

The night passed without incident. On the following day he knew that a conference had been held at Forbach between Marshal Bazaine, Generals Frossard, De Failly, Lebrun, Soleille, in command of the artillery, and Coffinières, in command of the Génie. It had been decided at that meeting that the 2nd corps, supported by Bazaine on the right and by Failly on the left, should attack Sarrebrück. The Emperor fixed the action for August 2.

Du Breuil reflected. Incalculable results might depend upon this first battle on the Sarre—the confidence and the enthusiasm of the troops, the moral effect, everything which, in the terrible game of military probabilities, reverberated so deeply in the soul of the army and of the country. Appointed in the morning, and a quarter of an hour afterwards told he would have to stay where he was, he had the annoyance of seeing his comrade Kelm leave for Sarrebrück in his place. He seemed to feel displeasure at the little yellow Captain, whose envious face had a cunning smile upon it, at the bottom of the room at headquarters. In compensation he had exchanged a few words with Restaud, the officer whose intelligent ugliness and serious look attracted him. Until two o'clock he could hardly keep himself still ; contradictory despatches and rumours brought the stifled echo, the great murmur of the fight. He imagined the army on the march, the attack, the battle with its sudden changes, the cries, the assaults, the recoils, the wavering lines of men amid the smoke and the

smell of the powder. His former chief, Colonel Deresse, of the Artillery, would certainly be taking part in it.

Suddenly Colonel Laune called him. Stout Colonel Jacquemère, head of the *matériel* department, was in consultation with him. Du Breuil was to go to the station. Some trains, intended to assure the immediate transport of an army corps, were to be held in reserve, and to again leave for the stations between Metz, Frouard, and Thionville. He was to see if these important measures could be put into execution from one hour to another.

He went in the direction of the railway-station thinking deeply. Hardly, however, had he reached the Porte Serpenoise, where innumerable recruiting carriages blocked the way, than a voice called to him :

‘Du Breuil !’

He turned. Décherac galloped up to him. Counter-order. Those in authority had changed their minds. Du Breuil shrugged his shoulders.

‘I was certain,’ he said. He had been disturbed three times that day for nothing.

They had some difficulty in extricating themselves from among the vehicles. A huge cart-horse with shaggy hoofs and disorderly mane, excited by Décherac’s mare, had commenced to neigh furiously. The animal plunged right and left between the shafts, and tried, by a series of jerks, to raise the heavy load. Its master ran up and calmed its ardour with a storm of blows from his whip.

‘Come, now, don’t strike so hard,’ said a sly-looking old peasant, lighting his pipe. ‘He isn’t a Prussian.’

‘If he was,’ said the carter, a rosy-cheeked, red-haired, ugly man, glowing with health, ‘I should strike harder than that.’

He laughed, showing his animal teeth, and looked for the approbation of the two officers. They turned their heads.

‘Ah, là, là !’ fumed the annoyed carter. ‘Fine fellows these with their hobby-horses !’

‘I have a good mind to go on to the station,’ said Du Breuil. ‘Perhaps we may hear something.’

A Light Infantry Lieutenant with sparkling eyes appeared, almost at a run. Du Breuil recognised Marquis, the news-monger. The man was waving his képi.

‘Victory, Major !’ he cried. ‘The Prussians are routed ; we sent them to the devil. The mitrailleuses worked splendidly ! Sarrebrück is in ashes. There are several thousand prisoners.’

A gig, harnessed to an old horse, stopped. A stout gentleman with a fresh complexion saluted them. It was M. Dumaine, one of the guests at the Bersheim dinner-party, and he had just come from the railway-station.

‘Quite a triumph, gentlemen. We have invaded Germany. The Emperor and the Prince Imperial exposed themselves during the fight with admirable courage. At the present time our army, like one man, is moving on Sarrelouis.’

The hearts of Du Breuil and Décherac beat violently. They were encircled by carters, estafettes, and passers-by. Du Breuil thought but little of spilt blood. ‘Sarrebrück in ashes. The mitrailleuses worked splendidly!’—words which he repeated awakened in him only thoughts of hope and success. In his soul of a soldier and of a Frenchman he had doubted, he had feared. This victory filled him with proud joy. Come, the Empire still possessed its star!

Some people arrived from the railway-station. The news was in everybody’s mouth. An old woman, passing near the officers, said:

‘They have killed them, they have killed them! . . .’

She shook her head; and in her accent, in her gaze, was mystery and stupor. . . . Those young men who would no longer eat or drink, and who, up yonder on the heights and in the ditches, strewed the ground!

‘Yes; they must have killed them,’ said M. Dumaine, in a peaceable tone, as though nothing was more natural. ‘Gentlemen, pleased to have met you.’

A cruel disillusion awaited them at headquarters. Major Kelm had arrived from Sarrebrück. Surrounded by quite a large number of officers, he gave an account of the action. The Bataille division, assisted by a brigade of the Laveaucoupet division, alone had taken part in it. They had stormed the heights and dislodged the Germans from Sarrebrück. That was all. Questions came from all sides. The dry, precise Laune summed them up by saying:

‘What were the German forces?’

‘Nothing very great, Colonel. A small garrison of two regiments at the most. The cavalry and artillery were insignificant.’

But Kelm’s pessimism, his horror or exaggeration and boasting, were well known. He was an excellent officer, but his disbelief in the most averred piece of news was carried too far.

‘But the prisoners and the enemy’s losses?’

‘Prisoners! Hardly a hundred. As to the mitrailleuses, it is true they did some destruction to a few platoons on the railway embankment.’

Du Breuil met Décherac’s eyes. They mistrusted the sudden change in their feelings, not wishing to pass from a state of enthusiasm to too great a state of deception. Kelm was undoubtedly under-estimating things. But in the evening they had to accept the evidence. The action had been a *combat de parade*, and was reduced to elements so simple that a child could have traced them in the sand. The 1st brigade of the Bataille division had stormed the heights by way of the railway, the woods, and the road leading from Forbach to Sarrebrück; the 2nd brigade took Saint-Arnual, and fell back on the manœuvring-ground, the Exercitz-Platz. And both had dislodged the enemy, and then vigorously cannonaded them from that place. The railway-station and the bridge had also been bombarded.*

It was undoubtedly a success, but it by no means justified the exaggeration of the first account. The disenchantment spread to the whole army and to the town. Du Breuil asked himself why the troops were stopping where they were. Why had they not occupied Sarrebrück, which was captured first? This long-awaited, long-hoped-for battle was, then, only an official ceremony—a baptism of fire. Comments were made upon Bazaine’s abstention from the fight. Had he wished to leave the honour, some said the responsibility, to General Frossard? Was he still discontentedly holding himself apart? However that may be, he had not appeared, leaving the three army corps under his orders to get out of their difficulties without him. . . . The Emperor had asked for him in vain upon arriving on the battle-field. The Marshal had left Forbach in the morning, going across the woods in the direction of Werden. General Lebrun had not been able to find him again.

What matter? The day had been a satisfactory one. There had been an awakening from this nightmare of inaction and waiting. At last they were commencing business. It was the first step.

* The field was badly chosen, owing to ignorance on the part of the French generals both of the topography of the region and of the position of the enemy. Only about seventy soldiers were wounded on either side. It is stated that the only true despatch concerning the battle was the one sent to Berlin by the Prussians.—F. L.

CHAPTER III.

Du BREUIL spent the night of the 3rd and the early morning of the 4th of August in transcribing despatches and movement orders.

At that very time a projected operation of the 4th corps on Sarrelouis had just been abandoned. The Thionville police commissary reported, in fact, the passage at Treves of forty thousand Prussians. From which side would they debouch? . . . The energy of his faculties seemed to him to be doubled. Nothing damped his zeal. It was in obedience to a feeling of honour and solidarity that he thus expended his energy. There were too many complaints, too many grievances against the staff, for there not to be reason for an example.

Besides, his department was the worst overburdened of all. Of the two Captains occupied with the same work, one of them, Massoli, stout, short-sighted, a man with jet-black hair, was continually moaning. He had to have his food cooked without seasoning, milk at every meal, and a cushion to sit upon. The other, De Francastel, a flighty chatterer with a bird-like face, had his head full of stories about women and recollections of the boulevard. His misadventures were a source of enlivenment. He pretended that he could speak German admirably, but when he was charged to question a prisoner, he jabbered in such a grotesque jargon that the non-commissioned officer, a stiff Uhlan with red hair, burst into laughter.

It was only at daybreak that Du Breuil was able to take some rest. When he awoke two hours afterwards, he saw at his bedside a powerful gray dog, looking at him patiently and attentively. Behind the animal, seated upon a chair, was a Captain of the Lancers of the Guard, his sword between his legs, dressed in a sky-blue kurka and a czapska upon his head. Lacoste, his face still energetic, his look still frank, not in the least changed, smiled at him.

‘What, is that you? Why didn’t you wake me?’

‘Titan and I have just arrived. You were sleeping so soundly. . . .’ Lacoste had a joyous air. ‘Here we are, all the same! Arrived yesterday evening after twenty-four hours in the train. Men and horses worn out. But what a reception on the route! Everybody’s head has been turned by the news

from Sarrebrück. Flowers and cries of "Long live the army!" Just think! The first victory. We heard of it in Paris when we were about to leave. You should have seen the enthusiasm. It was simply tremendous. . . . Then, hardly had we got camped than I had the pleasure to learn we are to set off at five in the morning with the whole of the division. But it's almost certain they won't leave till after breakfast. Then, as I had to come to the Place, I wanted to shake you by the hand. After that I must be off, for there is work to be done.'

Du Breuil drew aside the curtains and opened the window. Both men leant on the sill and inhaled the air.

'The weather is cool and cloudy,' said Lacoste. 'Excellent for marching. Do you know exactly where we're going?'

'To Boulay.'

'Anywhere, provided we march; I don't care. What a deception this Sarrebrück! You cannot imagine the joy and the delirium in Paris. A bundle of straw on fire—we're just like that. . . . But this time the great blow will be given. Well, my time's up.'

They descended together. Lacoste accepted a glass of hot coffee. Titan at one bite swallowed the *petit-pain* thrown to him by his master.

A graceful mare, under the care of the orderly, was waiting in the street.

'Good-morning, Musette,' said Du Breuil, stroking her neck.

'*Au revoir*, my dear fellow,' said Lacoste, with tears in his eyes. 'God knows when I shall see you again.'

He jumped into the saddle. Musette, who was pawing the ground impatiently, set off at a slow trot; Titan, overflowing with joy, preceded her with heavy bounds. Du Breuil experienced a feeling of pleasure.

'Good old Lacoste!'

He then saw M. Bersheim, who appeared looking radiant. He was holding a letter in his hand.

'Good-morning, my dear friend. I hope you have had news from home. The postal service is very irregular. Here is a letter which has been delayed for some considerable time.'

Du Breuil had, indeed, twice written to his parents, and had as yet received no reply. Bersheim added:

'It's my cuirassier, André, who wrote this. He tells me that our Zouave again feels the effects of the African fevers. Poor Maurice was always delicate, but the climate of Alsace will cure him. He has great hopes of winning promotion at the

first engagement. It's terrifying, isn't it? to have children in the fight. Well, my dear friend, I am very calm. And my daughter, too, is brave. You see, when one is told that the people we love are doing their duty, one is comforted. My wife alone is unreasonable. The motherly love in her is awakened, and she worries herself to death. "Pooh! all bullets don't kill," I've said to her over and over again. She had a terrible time last night.'

Bersheim retained the face of a man who sleeps, whose conscience is at rest. But perhaps he was putting on a better countenance than he had a mind to, for suddenly his eyes filled with tears and his mouth trembled slightly.

'I have faith in God,' he said; then, after a silence: 'Guess where I am going. To say good-bye to D'Avol. I am taking him a few good cigars to slip into his saddle-bags. I am sure he's never thought of any. But Anine thinks of everything. And I am taking General Boisjol a bottle of that old kirsch which he seemed to appreciate. What are you thinking about?'

Du Breuil reddened. He had called Anine to mind, and, in a very indefinite and dim way, was envying her kind attention for D'Avol, at the same time considering it was the most natural thing in the world. She would certainly not have had the same attention for him. But what was he, after all? A former friend of the family, perhaps almost forgotten. All the same, she *had* welcomed him like a close friend.

The Guard had commenced to leave Metz since morning.

Bands played. A stream of men and cannon passed out by the Porte des Allemands beyond the walls, convoys following amid clouds of dust.

After breakfast he saw the cavalry division go by. It advanced, four abreast, at a walk, headed by the light brigade. The light green pelisses of the light cavalry soldiers, the dark green of the flugelmen, the white cross-belts and rows of shining buttons on their breasts, gave this pomp of war a joyous appearance, the small, fiery, foaming gray horses of the cavalry contrasting with the large, quieter Normandy horses of the flugelmen. Officers and soldiers, with that mocking indifference customary to horsemen, gazed over the heads of the people. The Empress's Dragoons and the lancers next appeared, the former in green, and the latter in their blue uniforms. The small flags on the lances fluttered. Lacoste, mounted on Musette, saw Du Breuil from a distance and saluted him with his sword. In the rear-rank was an old quartermaster, covered

with medals—the one who had received Du Breuil at the barracks at Saint-Cloud. Stiff and grave, he turned his head neither one way nor another. The carabineers and cuirassiers on their huge horses were in the rear, the former with gold, and the latter with silver, breastplates. At the head of these squadrons was the gigantic Couchorte, looking like a man of another age. Harsh and strident trumpets sounded, making the horses prick up their ears and the men straighten their figures. Veterans, covered with medals, and robust horses—still the cavalry filed past. This splendid division gave an impression of redoubtable force—a force which was still more emphasized by the guns of two batteries which rolled over the paving-stones with a noise like thunder. Du Breuil, filled with pride, watched the last breastplates and the last horses disappear in the distance.

The day passed without any news being received. Towards evening vague and mysterious rumours, foreboding ill-omened occurrences, spread about. One of MacMahon's divisions had been attacked and beaten back. Du Breuil could not believe it. People and officers from the town, eager for news, poured into headquarters. Nothing was known. He was then ordered to take some registers to the Prefecture to Marshal Lebœuf.

The Prefecture, with its small courtyard always full of comers and goers, its open windows of the central first-floor, occupied by officers of all ranks who had accompanied the Emperor, the confusion of its kitchens in the right wing—some scullions dressed in white and some livery-servants were just at that time occupied in unloading a waggon-load of provisions—with its superabundance of employés and officials, its inquisitive and idle people, seemed to him more like a branch of the Hôtel de l'Europe than the quiet residence of the Sovereign. More than once, when his duties had called him there, he had glanced at the high closed windows on the second-floor, where the private apartments of the Emperor and the Prince Imperial were situated. The destiny of the army, the destiny of France, was there.

An unusual state of agitation reigned there that evening. Groups of people were standing here and there; shadows appeared on the blinds of the brilliantly illumined windows. A stout butler crossed the courtyard on tiptoe, looking, in his maroon coat, like a large cockchafer. When on the threshold, he turned round, bringing to view a discomfited face. Then he proceeded towards a buffet which had been fitted up in one of

the large rooms. His face was known to Du Breuil; he had noticed the man full of assurance and majesty at the dinner at Saint-Cloud.

Hardly had he entered the room, in which Aides-de-camp, orderly officers, and Generals were crowding, than the bad news struck him full in the face. There was a confused noise of exclamations, incredulous sneers and low complaints. The telegram had just arrived at the telegraph-office which had been fitted up in one of the offices of the Prefecture. It stated that a brigade of the Abel Douay division,* belonging to the 1st Army Corps, had been surprised at Wissemburg by very superior forces; that General Douay was killed, and his troops repulsed from Geissberg. Their camp was in the hands of the enemy. On the other hand, the Baden-Wurtemberger corps had crossed the frontier at the low part of the river Lauter, and occupied Lauterberg.

Du Breuil was thunderstruck. Everybody was stupefied. Blache was purple, and his prominent teeth made his air of a wild-boar still more pronounced. In the middle of a group of officers, General Jaillant was commenting upon the occurrence in a decisive tone of voice, and always with quibbles, evasions, *ifs* and *buts*—an exemplification of the impossibility in the French character of acknowledging that they could have been badly informed, badly instructed, and badly protected.

'Douay surprised!' they repeated, as if in emulation of one another.

The emotion produced in the imperial *entourage* resulted on the following day in important measures being taken. A general order from the Emperor gave the command of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th corps to Marshal Bazaine; that of the 1st, 5th, and 7th to MacMahon—but for military operations only. The Guard, recalled on Metz and sent to Courcelles, remained at the disposal of the Sovereign. The 5th corps was to be directed from Sarreguemines on to Bitche; and Marshal Canrobert was urgently summoned to Nancy with his four divisions. The situation was serious. The 2nd corps being too hemmed in at Sarrebrück, General Frossard, during the day, asked for and obtained authorization to fall back on Forbach. The

* This was the first defeat the French received. General Abel Douay was camped on the Geissberg, a hill south-east of Wissemburg, with 9,000 men. He was attacked by the Prince Royal, who had 180,000 men at his command. The French advanced as best they could across the Lauter against the Germans, who were in ambuscade on the opposite heights. This battle opened up Alsace to the German forces.—F. L.

German forces on that side were increasing in numbers. It was still asked, however, at the general staff if the 7th Prussian Army Corps was proceeding from Trèves on Sarrelouis or was going to join the remains of the first army in the direction of Sarrebrück.

The giving up of the command to Bazaine was much commented upon. Many, basing their conclusions on the Marshal's merit, saw in the step a pledge of future success. People were unanimous in deploring the interference of the Emperor and the Commander-General in the management of affairs. Certain people, through policy, rejoiced to see authority, which public opinion claimed for him, restored to Bazaine, tardy and incomplete though it was. His disgrace upon returning from Mexico, although he had since been in command of the 3rd corps at Nancy and then of the Imperial Guard, had made him dear to the Opposition. His partisans glorified him, and complained aloud of the discontent which had been caused by placing him on one side at the commencement of the campaign.

Towards night-time Du Breuil was again called to the Prefecture, and was charged, to his great joy, with a special mission. The vanguard of the first Prussian army was only a few miles from Sarrebrück. He was ordered to take to General Frossard all information in regard to the enemy's forces which the staff had been able to collect. Steinmetz, it was said, was going to appear on the Sarre with the heads of the columns of the 7th corps (Zastrow) and 8th corps (Goeben). And Prince Frederick Charles's army was not far off. Du Breuil was also to restore the 2nd corps to its former position.

He took the train at dawn for Forbach.

Notwithstanding the early hour, the station was crowded with travellers. The approach of the Germans had resulted in the whole length of the line being crowded to an extraordinary extent. The compartment in which Du Breuil was seated with Décherac, who was charged with a similar mission to Bazaine at Saint-Avold, was coupled between two files of carriages filled with reservists, who were rejoining their corps. Their heads hanging out of the carriage windows, they were greeting everything which attracted their attention with exclamations and laughter. Some had resumed their military habits, brusque and free; others, fathers of families, maintained a homely physiognomy. Du Breuil looked at his travelling companions. He recognised a tall individual dressed in a soft hat and a

complete suit of velvet, leather gaiters, a field-glass slung across his shoulder, and his pocket bursting with notebooks. It was one of the journalists of the *Café Parisien*. The train crossed the plain of Sablon. He lowered the window. They passed the *Pâté Redoute*, with its group of trees, the hill of *Queuleu*, its gardens in the shape of an amphitheatre, their sombre verdure arranged on the clear sky in rows one above the other. A blue mist wavered above the *Seille*, and in the keen air there floated a smell of the fresh earth and of the morning. Some peasants were working in the fields. The sun appeared. The wet grass sparkled. A cow raised its head as the train passed.

The two officers exchanged a look. How beautiful it was this morning! Exquisite hour! . . . It was a pleasure to live. The rain, which had fallen all night, had washed the sky. The roads were still hollowed into little ravines by the water.

At *Faulquemont* a property-owner of the district got into the compartment to go to *Créhange*, where he owned some land. He had a fear for his young plants; in all probability they had been ravaged by the terrible storm of the previous night, which had raged over all the district.

Du Breuil said :

‘The army must be like a wet rag. This rain, you know, on the eve of fighting is terrible. Icy-cold shirts, stiff godillots, muddy trousers—all these things in the end tell on the *morale* of the soldiers.’

‘Pooh!’ exclaimed *Décherac*; ‘the sun will remedy that.’

The train was travelling at full speed across a rich country—fields, the soil of which was red and fertile; extensive prairies, smoking in a golden light; the blue waters of the German *Nied*. Far into the distance, on the roads, broken up by the storm, convoys were winding their way; long files of vehicles, the wheels half buried in ruts, provision and ammunition waggons, equipages of all kinds, proceeded under the protection of small escorts. One carried away a vision of muddy horses and men toiling along the roads.

In the frame of the carriage window he saw the regular rise and fall of the telegraph-wires, the sudden interception of an embankment. Then came the rumbling of the train as it passed through a tunnel. A small wood, a copse with fresh foliage sparkling with rain, *Folschwiller*, the camp of a division of infantry with the lines of camp-fires, the piles of guns, the red and blue movement of the bivouac, appeared.

Saint-Avoid was reached. Décherac left the train, as well as part of the reservists.

The train now followed the valley of the Rosselle. Rosbrück! Du Breuil, through an opening between two hills, in the distance saw German territory, with its horizon of fields, villages, and trees. By simple reason of a demarcation post this territory, exactly like that of France, with its fields, its villages, and its trees, became a mysterious region of ambushes and hatred. As he approached the frontier, he experienced a feeling of anxiety and anguish. It was a new and deep feeling—one full of repulsion, mystery, intoxication. For the first time he understood how much he was bound to the earth, this red and fertile soil, to the fatherland, by secret living fibres.

One or two gunshots in the distance—scouts or vedettes were they who were firing?—resounded in his heart. He entered into a special atmosphere. At last Forbach was reached. The railway skirted the whole length of the town. The presence there of the headquarters of the 2nd corps filled the small and usually silent streets with agitation. Men, carriages, and horses crowded the squares.

The train stopped. Everybody got out.

As soon as he arrived he made some inquiries. An orderly officer, whom he met at the station exit, was able to give him the information he required. On the previous evening the 2nd corps had carried out the movement ordered for the morning, and the troops occupied their new camp. They were expecting to be attacked any minute. Headquarters were still at Forbach. Du Breuil would be certain to find General Frossard there.

He took the road leading to the town, and when on the way met a squadron of dragoons. Sitting bolt upright on their mud-covered horses, with their stiffened sheepskins, their white cloaks turned to a dirty yellow, their rusty scabbards, their long moustaches drooping down under their tarnished helmets, they had the air of a horde of barbarians. The storm had left traces of its passage on the road. Du Breuil bestrode large puddles and rivulets of water. Every yard he met single soldiers or small detachments of men with soiled coats and képis knocked out of shape by the rain. All wore a martial air; all were full of confidence and high spirits. A dense roseate fog was disappearing in the sun. How long the night must have been under the small tents for all these brave fellows sleeping on the uplands and in the valleys, in the midst

of the darkness impregnated with water! He thought to himself of the black hours, interrupted by showers and squalls, the disturbed sleep, the dampness, the cold, and the gloomy awakening on the sticky earth in the pale morning. . . . He entered the town at eight o'clock, as General Frossard and his staff were about to leave.

'Hullo, Du Breuil!' cried Major Laisné.

They had known each other during the Italian campaign. Laisné wasn't a bit changed. He was the same tall, dry man, with an enormous nose and moustache resembling a cat's whiskers.

'And what are you going to do here?' he asked.

'Special mission. I want to see your General.'

General Frossard, wrapped in a hooded cloak, appeared on the threshold of the Bouc d'Or. He advanced upon seeing Du Breuil, inquiry in his look. . . . He was quite another man to the guest at the dinner at Saint-Cloud; one felt that here was a leader, a man with a responsible intelligence, engaged in a struggle with events and the unknown. Du Breuil read the particulars which he had brought. The General nodded his head.

'Arrange with Laisné about the position of the troops. I took upon myself to commence the movement yesterday. It was time.'

There was the sound of a horse galloping over the paving-stones. A Second Lieutenant in the Light Artillery reined up sharp before the decorated group and saluted, his hand on a level with his talpack.

'Columns of the enemy's infantry, preceded by lines of sharp-shooters, are descending the heights of Sarrebrück. Squadrons of Uhlans and cuirassiers are advancing along the road; they can be seen distinctly from the spur of Spickeren.'

Du Breuil was questioning Major Laisné, who consulted some notes and unfolded a map.

'You will understand better. . . . There is Sarrebrück, where we were yesterday; here is our position to-day. You see, we are at the base of a triangle, of which Sarrebrück is the apex; the Sarre to the east is one of the sides, and the railway with the Saint-Avold road on the west is the other—'

'Yes, yes; I know the country!' exclaimed Du Breuil.

And upon the map, striated with fine hatchings, he saw the configuration of the district as upon a plan in relief—the heights of Spickeren, its wooded slopes descending on the right

to Saint-Arnual and the Sarre, on the left to Forbach and the road.

In the centre of the Rotheberg was the spur advancing into the valley which separates Spickeren and Sarrebrück. To the left, on a spur of the forest of Forbach the tall chimneys of the Styring iron-works. Then, further back, was the plain of Ætingen, and that of Cadenbronn, the culminating point in this mountainous whole.

'The 3rd division, Laveaucoupet,' continued Laisné, pointing out on the map some small red marks, 'are in two lines on the plain of Spickeren, facing north. His battalion of chasseurs occupies the spur, which has been fortified. The valley and the road can be commanded from there, and a downward fire can be directed to the ground before Styring. . . . The 2nd division, Bataille, is in reserve at Ætingen. The 1st, under the command of Vergé, is in the plain. Forbach, the head of our railway, our *matériel*, our supplies, must be defended. The Jolivet brigade covers Styring. The Valazé brigade to the west of the town on the Kaninchensberg, commands the road and Sarrelouis.'

Du Breuil wrote accordingly in his pocket-book.

'That being so,' he said, 'you will be able to stoutly await attack. Besides, the 3rd corps is not far off.'

A telegram from the Emperor, which was sent to the general staff two nights before, had, in fact, ordered Marshal Bazaine to remove the Decaen division with the headquarters and reserves to Saint-Avold, the Methan division to Marientoual, the Montaudon division to Sarreguemines, and the Castagny division to Puttrelange. All these points were not more than fifteen or sixteen kilometres from Forbach.

A rumbling was heard.

'Cannon,' murmured Laisné nervously. . . . '*Au revoir*, my dear fellow. I must leave you.'

'And what's become of Deresse?' asked Du Breuil, as Laisné moved towards his horse, a beautiful chestnut.

The whole staff mounted on horseback.

'Wounded at the Sarrebrück attack. . . . You didn't know? . . . Ball in his stomach. . . . He's at the ambulance here. . . . You can see him. . . .'

He lowered his voice. General Frossard passed before them—silent, his eyes fixed, his thoughts elsewhere. He moved away, with bent head, at a walking pace upon a large bay thoroughbred, followed by his cortège of indifferent

officers who laughed and conversed in a low voice about one thing and another.

An inhabitant, to whom Du Breuil made an inquiry about the ambulance, offered to guide him.

Deresse ! On the way he called up the never-to-be-forgotten silhouette of the old officer who had grown gray in the service of his country, adored by his men, severe and good, with his imperial already turning gray, his high bald forehead and his pure eyes. Truly, a man of duty ! Deresse wounded ! A feeling of revolt against the blind bullet which had struck him, the injustice of fate, came over him. Why this man rather than another ? His heart beat fast upon reaching the ambulance.

But there were only some soldiers and two non-commissioned officers there. Du Breuil felt the eyes of one of them, a small, beardless, pale-faced sergeant, fixed upon his gold shoulder-knots—a hostile look in which there was a mixture of curiosity and raillery. One of his legs had been amputated, and he was smoking quite philosophically. By his side was a gigantic Westphalian Uhlan, whose cheeks had been pierced by a bullet, and who was now dying with a convulsive rattle in his throat. At the bottom of the room Du Breuil saw the broad back of a man in a cassock bending over a soldier, who was turning his head away in fierce silence.

‘ M. l’Abbé ! ’ he exclaimed.

The priest turned. A frank smile lit up his face. That broad back, that jovial bearing. . . . Du Breuil recognised the Abbé Trudaine, whom he had met a fortnight before in the lobbies of the Ministry of War.

‘ Ah, Major ! Happy to see you again. ’

He had succeeded in getting his services accepted as assistant-chaplain to the 2nd corps. He had bought a small vehicle and a horse, stocked his boxes with provisions, and with this equipage followed the troops, distributing Liebig’s beef-tea, medals which had been blessed by the Pope, and chocolate. . . . His pockets bulged with packets of tobacco. While he was talking to Du Breuil, he gave three of them to soldiers who had been slightly wounded, suddenly stopped before a window from which could be seen the distant woods, black against the blue sky, sighed, ‘ They are in ambush there, ’ and concluded by asking the Major in what way he could be of service to him.

He gave an exclamation at the name of Deresse. The

Colonel was being nursed at a private house, that of M. Schneiber, very decent people, glue manufacturers. He was just going there. On the way he again pointed out the woods, with their heavy, impenetrable blackness; at night-time sinister flashes of light could be seen there. They were swarming with Prussians.

‘A single shell fired from there and it’s all up with the ambulance. I’ve warned the General. Do you know what he said to me in reply? “Get to your patients, M. l’Abbé, and leave us to our cannon!”’

With a bitterness which Du Breuil thought very comical, he branched out into military questions. A dull explosion resounded, then a second one, and a third. A confused rumbling could be heard. The Abbé Trudaine listened. . . . Not a sound more. . . . Perhaps it was thunder. . . . He rang the bell at a gate grown over by large violet clematis. A thickset, red-haired young man, with an intelligent air, opened the door. The Abbé introduced him: ‘M. Schneiber junior.’ . . . The Colonel wasn’t any better; he hadn’t closed his eyes since noon.

There was a small and very neat gravelled courtyard, four lime-trees, a border of grass and geranium plants, a large vase made of blue glass; the house was freshly plastered, the flight of steps leading up to the door was made of enamelled bricks, and the house had green shutters. The whole gave an impression of composure, silence, and the provinces.

Colonel Deresse was stretched in the middle of a bed in a fine bedroom on the first-floor, facing the window open to the sun and the pure air. He had not changed. There was the same high bald forehead and blue eyes. But he was horribly pale, and his imperial also was white. He recognised Du Breuil, smiled at him pleasantly and pressed his hand. The sinister rumbling in the distance recommenced. Everybody turned towards the window and listened. An expression of sadness came into the eyes of the wounded man. Then he said in a low but distinct voice:

‘They are fighting.’

With sudden precision Du Breuil again beheld events of which he had never thought during the past ten years: the morning of the fight of Buffalora, the solicitude with which Deresse had fed his men—‘his children’—at dawn, his grave, attentive face from the time firing was commenced, and his restrained sorrow when the first men were wounded. . . .

As though he had read his thoughts, Deresse said :

‘It was my turn. . . . Come, friend, I am resigned. The bullet which kills us is cast for all eternity. Our only duty is to be ready.’

The low rumbling in the blue sky commenced again. Deresse, exhausted, closed his eyes. Du Breuil left the room on tip-toe, followed by the Abbé Trudaine and M. Schneiber. The last-named had an astonishing resemblance to his son, only he was stouter, and his hair was gray. Downstairs a servant was laying some luncheon on a corner of the table in the dining-room—a smoking omelette, brown bread, creamy butter pearly with water, and Lorraine sausage. The sun was shining full into the courtyard, bathing the fresh grass and the brilliant red of the geraniums in a warm light. A light covered cart, its shafts in the air, was standing in the middle, and through the open door of a stable could be seen young Schneiber harnessing a solid little roan pony.

In the distance—the Abbé Trudaine said from the direction of Spickeren—the cannonade became brisker.

‘A regular battle,’ said M. Schneiber.

Du Breuil was so impatient he could not hold himself still. He gazed at the horizon. He went to the window and came back, with every now and then a remark thrown in.

‘My son is like yourself, Major. As soon as he hears the cannon, it is stronger than himself. I’ve reasoned with him, but off he goes. He prowls about in the neighbourhood of the warmest part of the fight. And then one never knows. Sometimes one can do some good—carry off a wounded soldier. . . .’

The horse was between the shafts, and luncheon was ready.

‘If you have a mind, Major, have a bit of something to eat, and the youngster will drive you.’

CHAPTER IV.

ONE hour afterwards the light covered cart ascended the steep slope of the Kreutzberg. Sitting by the side of young Schneiber, Du Breuil had kept his ears well open, but not a sound was to be heard. The battle, however, had commenced. When he was leaving he had met near the railway-station an officer of the staff who had just taken a telegram from General Frossard to Marshal Bazaine to the telegraph-office, announc-

ing the battle, and asking for assistance. The struggle was at Spickeren.

It was eleven o'clock. The road wound up the mountain between thick underwood, its dense thickets with tree-trunks crowded together, and black foliage rising up on each side. The deep-blue, cloudless sky was stretched far above like a canopy. The weather was hot ; not a sound could be heard. Some insects only flew round and round in the heavy atmosphere. The grass on the slopes was motionless.

This silence in the long-run was disquieting. Doubtless, when the top of the hill was reached, something would be heard. . . . Du Breuil was astonished to think he was on this road, seated in a cart, a few kilometres from the battle-field. When his mission was accomplished, why had he not taken the train again ? Bah ! he was just as well there as in his office at Metz. . . . He might even make himself useful, take back some fresh information to headquarters. . . . And, then, this itching for action, this need of knowledge ! . . . He had no difficulty in convincing himself that by remaining he was, in short, only doing his duty.

Why did they hear nothing more ? Perhaps the wind had changed, or the mountain intercepted the sound. . . . They had just reached the top of the Kreutzberg. The road turned sharply. Immediately there broke upon their ears, at first muffled, and then distinctly, the roar of the battle. The view in front was still restricted by a bend in the road, and at each side by woody slopes ; there was nothing but deep verdure and blue sky. But at the turning, on the declivity which rose towards them in a straight line, Du Breuil saw some horses harnessed to artillery caissons pass at full speed, amid a cloud of dust. They were headed by a quartermaster ; the drivers were leaning forward on their horses' necks, urging them forward with blows from their whips, the heavy vehicles rolling along with a tremendous noise—a convoy without ammunition, which was doubtless going to Forbach to get a fresh stock. . . . They passed some estafettes proceeding at a gallop ; peasants who were driving before them troops of sheep and oxen ; carts filled with furniture, tables, chairs, mattresses, articles thrown *pêle-mêle*. Their cart passed a file of ammunition waggons loaded with bread. The officer under whose guidance they were had a very troubled look in his face. The cannon roared with violence. The small escort of fatigue-duty men, guns in their hands, cursed as they tramped alongside the vehicles.

On the low side of the road, to the left, a staff officer, carrying some despatch or other, was sweeping forward upon his horse with slackened rein. He cried out: 'Get out of the way—get out of the way!' Du Breuil only had time to catch a glimpse of his red face. They reached Etzling. As they were about to leave the main road to strike out northwards to Spickeren by way of a road through the wood, Schneiber recognised one of his cousins, M. Briand, an inhabitant of Forbach, in a break drawn up on the square facing the church. M. Briand brought triumphant news from Sarreguemines. Since morning it had been persistently rumoured that MacMahon had gained a great victory. It was the revenge of Wissemburg. The Marshal had overcome the army of the Prince Royal, and taken forty thousand prisoners. . . . M. Briand, carried away with joy, waved his cap, crying, 'Long live France!'

The cart moved towards Spickeren, from the plateau of which could be seen the red roofs of the village, and the Geneva flag floating from the top of the church. It was a district of deep ravines, steep slopes, hills, and everywhere, in the hollows and on the heights, black woods intersecting the red furrows of the cultivated soil with dense underwood. Du Breuil listened with pride to the increasing uproar of the struggle. The sun was resplendent in his eyes; the azure became light, and Victory passed through it, beating the pure air with her quivering wing. Frossard was perhaps going to follow up MacMahon's splendid success. That news was a good omen. . . . It might, of course, be lessened in importance; but what matter? It warmed the heart.

Suddenly, on the hill to the right, he saw two regiments of the line massed in battalions. They were waiting, their rifles at rest, for their turn to enter the fight. With their knapsacks on their backs, motionless, the men conversed. Far into the distance waved the line of blue coats and red trousers. Du Breuil contemplated with emotion this moving string of faces, this long and quivering line of flesh, possessed of thought and life. At times a joke would travel the whole length of the ranks, causing a ripple of laughter. Some of the men who were nervous looked straight before them, mechanically biting their moustaches, stamping the ground; others, who were resigned, waited in silence.

Tents were still erected around the village; camp effects were lying *pêle-mêle* near overturned pans; the fires were dying

out ; the streets were filled with troops. Before the Mayor's residence and the church, which had been transformed into temporary hospitals, were stationed the divisionary ambulances. It was impossible to advance. The roads leading to the plateau where the Micheler Brigade was fighting were crowded with foot soldiers, horse soldiers, artillerymen ; there was a constant coming and going of infirmiry attendants, with their stretchers, an incessant flow of ammunition-waggons. Empty battery caissons came to be refilled at the reserve ammunition-waggons. Bullets whistled down the streets. A horse harnessed to a canteen carriage was frightened by the increasing noise of musketry, and bolted, the heavy vehicle disappearing in the direction of the woods in the midst of the shrill cries of the women. . . .

Du Breuil wished at all cost to see how the fight was progressing. He thought of the church tower. What a splendid idea ! And while young Schneiber was putting up his cart in the courtyard of a wine-merchant, he entered the church, which was commencing to fill with wounded, stretched upon chairs, benches, or upon the ground, their heads resting against steps, their breasts bare, covered with blood. Sisters of Charity and some women were bathing their wounds with water, and binding them up with lint. The leader of a band acted as doctor, his only remedy being a bottle of smelling-salts. Complaints and sighs mingled in a single groan, which followed Du Breuil to the end of his ascent. When he had mounted the staircase, he succeeded, by means of his crampoons, in hoisting himself, white with dust and covered with cobwebs, to the topmost luthern.

He could not refrain from a cry of astonishment. Before him, in the foreground, was stretched out under the sun, and in the midst of smoke, the Spickeren plateau, with its woods, its glades, its fields, and its ravines. Everywhere was a blue and red movement of soldiers. He could distinguish the sharpshooters spread out, and the denser lines of the companies. Black helmets moved from the side of the forest of Saint-Armal. Every second the batteries belched forth flame and were enveloped in small clouds of smoke which were quickly dispersed in the immense red, floating cloud which here and there mounted skywards. Beyond the Spur, the opposite side of the valley, with its distant slopes rising one above the other to the heights of the Galgensberg and the Keppertsberg, was every now and then visible, when the wind rose.

German batteries crowned these heights with a circle of fire,

and there could be seen the black columns of the infantry descending on the right and left with a circular movement towards the woods. A crowd of helmets was also in movement more to the left on the ground lying before Styring. His eyes were riveted on this living landscape. At certain discharges, more violent than usual, the whole church tower vibrated, and the acrid smell of powder was so strong that it produced a sensation of choking. Amid confused noise he distinguished far-off calls, cries of rage and triumph, supreme commands, the complaints of the dying.

A view of the Spur was partly hidden by a small wood. Du Breuil was able, however, by means of his field-glass to make out an unusual movement at that spot. He saw some foot-soldiers out of breath; heard cries of joy. Was it possible? Pointed helmets were glittering in the first intrenchment. What were the *vitriers** thinking about? However, the 10th battalion of Chasseurs was there. Suddenly, after a long hand-to-hand fight, the wavering line retreated, and took shelter in the second intrenchment. But it again rushed forward and captured the Spur. Not a pointed helmet was to be seen. A cloud of smoke blocked out the view. In a minute, however, it had gone, and Du Breuil beheld in consternation that in the place of the Chasseurs was a black, moving mass. Were these Prussians mad?

Three o'clock struck. Du Breuil was intoxicated, and had lost all notion of time or place. Almost unconsciously he descended and found himself in the square. A General and his staff were standing under a quincunx of trees in the shade. Two escort hussars were in charge of the snorting horses, their flanks hollow. Not being able to find any grass, they threw back their heads and shoulders so as to crop the low branches, masticating their bits, the leaves and the froth. Du Breuil recognised General Doëns. They only had time to exchange a couple of words. One of General Laveaucoupet's Aides-de-camp galloped up, his face, down which perspiration was pouring, covered with dust, his horse bleeding. He asked for three battalions.

Du Breuil went in search of his cart. Some foot-soldiers were filing past at a quick step. They had deposited their knapsacks, and were walking cheerfully along, their rifles

* These were the so-called Chasseurs de Vincennes. They originally took their name because of their polished leather coats, which shone in the sunlight as though made of glass, *vitrier* meaning ordinarily a mender of windows.—F. L.

on their shoulders. 'Order! Order!' repeated an old Captain, in a fatherly tone. A battery of mitrailleuses went by at a quick trot. He could see nothing of the cart. Suddenly a riderless horse, its reins hanging loose, charged down a street. The animal drew up sharp on its four hoofs and neighed loudly. Its flank, wet with perspiration, moved up and down like a blacksmith's bellows. Without a moment's thought Du Breuil leapt into the saddle. An officer's cloak was on the cantle. In the holsters were a revolver and some maps. The poor beast had a large gash, from which blood was flowing, at the juncture of the neck and the shoulders.

The horse again neighed upon receiving the spur, and dashed off over the cultivated land in the direction of the plateau. Horse and rider were carried away by a furious madness. Du Breuil no longer retained possession of himself. Amid the bullets and the smoke he thus for a long time galloped on, crossed a ravine, jumped over tree-trunks, ditches, advanced and withdrew as though in a dream, in the very vortex of the *mêlée*. Whether this ride lasted a quarter of an hour or a century he had not the faintest idea. When he recovered consciousness, he was astonished to find himself, sword in hand, charging with the staff of General Laveaucoupet, whose gold-embroidered *képi* he distinguished ten *mètres* away. The Prussians were trying to extricate themselves from a wood. A running fire crepitated. But with savage cries the two battalions, headed by their officers, rushed madly forward brandishing their bayonets. They commenced to run, and Du Breuil felt himself at once drawn on by enthusiasm, and pushed forward by an irresistible force. The enemy gave way, followed by the maddened foot-soldiers.

He was then able to disengage himself, replace his sword in its scabbard, and slowly, because his horse was halting, to take the Spickeren road again. He tried to collect his ideas, but when he arrived before the church, he was still asking himself what motive he had obeyed. At that moment his horse fell dead. It had a splinter of a shell in its breast.

Fortunately, Schneiber, who was anxious, appeared on the scene. He had been looking for a long time for Du Breuil. . . . What time was it? Only four o'clock. The cart was ready. They set off again, but made little progress, being obliged almost at every yard to alter their course. The narrow streets were obstructed by vehicles in disorder. It was necessary to proceed through a confused mass of peasants,

people in flight, and wounded soldiers, who were lying upon straw, and were being evacuated on Forbach by cartloads. Every minute there were crushes among the people. Chasseurs and dragoons passed at a gallop with a volley of oaths. Further on were four sappers carrying a stretcher made of some tent canvas and four chassepots, upon which was stretched the rigid body of an officer. His coat and shirt were open, revealing a gaping wound in his breast. Du Breuil recognised by the pale face, the suffering eyes of which were open beyond all measure, a Colonel whom he had formerly met, but whose name he could not call to mind. Instinctively he rose, and, as a last homage, raised his hand to his képi and made the military salute.

His fever fell, and he remained stunned, demoralized, tired. The din of the battle behind them was abated, but, as if in revenge, it increased to the right. There were two distinct actions there. Those cursed helmets! He had recently seen them from the church tower. They were swarming in the Styring neighbourhood. The day was evidently undecided. Why didn't the Bataille division enter into line? And the 3rd corps? It was doubtless coming to the rescue. Du Breuil imagined the fresh troops setting out in haste from their four bivouacs, and reaching the cannon by forced marches.

The road divided into two, the light cart turning to the right into the wood in the direction of the Forbacherberg. Du Breuil and Schneiber turned round. A stifled voice called to them. A mounted gendarme had issued forth from a small covered pathway, and stood, bareheaded and his coat unbuttoned, at the cross-roads, crying with the air of one who has lost his way: 'Where is General Frossard?' Then, without waiting for a reply, he set off again like a madman in the direction of Spickeren. The road wound up the hillside between the underwood of the Spickeren-Wald, which was full of troops. A Captain, whose company bordered the declivity, told Du Breuil that the Brême-d'Or and Baraque Mouton had just been captured. The remainder of the battalion was there—he pointed to the slopes of the Forbacherberg.

'Be easy in your mind,' he said; 'we shall block up the road.'

The men, black with powder, their uniforms in disorder, covered with soil, blood, and dust, were standing, seated, and lying down, taking breath. Some were cleaning their guns; others were taking bread from their knapsacks, for they had not had anything to eat on the previous night.

The road descended perpendicularly. The small roan pony refused to advance. It was necessary to get out of the cart. The crackling of musketry, the regular report of volleys from the rifles, the dry rattle of the mitrailleuses, the roll of the cannon, could distinctly be heard. The Brême-d'Or captured? . . . That meant that the Forbach road was open. Fortunately, the road was commanded from the heights. . . . Spent bullets whistled on their way. Others cut the foliage of the trees.

They reached the road. The confusion was indescribable. An overflowing river of people in flight; canteen-carriages and waggons flowed along; infirmiry attendants with stretchers; wounded soldiers perched on cacolets and upon ambulance carriages; inhabitants of Styring, mad with terror. Everywhere, on the road and on the slopes, were disbanded soldiers, old people and women with children clinging to their skirts. Some peasants were carrying straw mattresses on their heads, or dragging after them a lamb or a calf frightened by the tumult. Artillery and ammunition convoys on their way to take part in the fight tried to reascend the current. Dominating the confusion was still that of the battle, which seemed to be thickest towards Styring. Detonations succeeded each other without stopping. But how was the road to be crossed?

Suddenly a platoon of cavalry, the escort of General Frossard, came down the right side. Du Breuil hastily profited by the open passage to slip between and reach the other side, where the Styring-Wendel joined. Alone, ahead of his staff, the General advanced at a walking pace upon his bay thoroughbred. A prey to destiny, he seemed to see nothing. His officers, behind him, silently spurred on their jaded horses. At the top of the Styring road the General, undecided, stopped. He took in with a look the valley, the woods, the high chimneys, and the ironworks, visible through the smoke. His eyes fell momentarily on Du Breuil without recognising him, perhaps without even seeing him. And with the same somnambulistic step he again set off, trailing behind him his silent cortège.

'Laisné!' cried Du Breuil.

The Major passed at his side. The officer turned his head, turned half round, at a bound leapt the embankment at the side of the road, and drew up near the cart. The enemy was constantly receiving reinforcements; everything was going badly. Our reserve division had joined the fight. Ground was being lost. And the 3rd corps did not arrive. . . .

'What can they be doing?'

Laisné stifled an oath. His mare was angrily pawing the ground and pulling with all her force to be off again. The road had become transformed into a torrent of people. He made a farewell gesture, and disappeared at a gallop, skirting the ditch.

‘Geeho, Poulet!’ The cart moved away. But after proceeding one hundred yards it was impossible to go any further. The road followed the edge of a wood, which was occupied by a battalion of the line, utilizing the embankment and the trees to direct a violent fire on the woods opposite, to which the Prussians had been beaten back. Du Breuil jumped out and, as he wished to push on towards Styring, persuaded Schneiber to put up his vehicle in the underwood. A quarter of an hour afterwards he entered the works. The tall furnaces had been lit, and the machinery was rumbling. The workmen were going backwards and forwards as though nothing abnormal was happening. The village, however, was the centre of resistance. To the right and left, in front of the houses, regiments and batteries were mingled, making a last effort. Alt-Styring was captured. The Prussians streamed in from all sides.

General Bataille and General Vergé were on horseback, standing at the entrance to the courtyard. Du Breuil saw them consult together for a moment, then General Bataille, sword in hand, reached the left of the village. Immediately the whole of the 67th of the line rushed forward with fixed bayonets and bugles blowing, the three battalions dashing into the woods.

Du Breuil, attracted by a groan behind him, turned his head. He was about to bend over the wounded man, a little artillery Lieutenant whose right leg was shattered, when cries rang out. On the ground swept by the charge three cannon, abandoned in the morning, were in battery. A fresh groan made him start. The wounded man, his head resting against the jamb of the door, moved. He raised himself on his elbow, and Du Breuil, following the direction of his look, saw him fixedly contemplating the abandoned cannon.

‘My guns . . .’ he murmured in despair. ‘My guns!’

But a Major, followed by some officers and a dozen men—artillerymen and foot-soldiers—spurred their horses straight towards them. Under a storm of bullets they reached the guns, leaped to the ground, hooked them on again, and set off at a gallop.

‘Bravo!’ cried Du Breuil; while the little Lieutenant, with a smile of ecstasy, fell back again in a faint.

‘Fire! fire!’ Cries of alarm were heard. The works were commencing to blaze. Big columns of white smoke whirled above the roofs, mingling with the black tops of the tall chimneys. The flames burst forth and leapt skywards. The remaining workmen fled in dismay. Du Breuil was about to move away, when he saw a compact group—General Vergé, General Frossard and his staff—standing before the door.

He approached, and Laisné came to him.

‘It’s going badly up there.’

The last news received from Spickeren was disastrous: the maddened enemy was always increasing in numbers; Laveaucoupet had entered the fight to the last man, the losses were heavy, the division was exhausted; General Doëns was killed. . . .

‘Killed!’ exclaimed Du Breuil. ‘But I only spoke to him half an hour ago.’

As he again saw the brave man full of life, his heart was oppressed. A Lieutenant of dragoons, his helmet dented, his epaulettes torn off, dashed up at full speed and asked for General Frossard. He was pointed out to him. In a broken voice the officer explained that an entire Prussian division was advancing on the Sarrelouis road. Colonel Dulac’s two divisions and the company of Engineers could no longer hold out. The Kaninchensberg was about to be evacuated.

Consternation was depicted on every face. Forbach captured, the extreme left turned—it was the *coup de grâce*! The day was irreparably lost. General Frossard ought at the commencement of the action to have sent the brigade charged to protect the town to the assistance of General Vergé. He had now no men left in reserve. It was only by sheer heroism that the three decimated divisions were holding out. Hour after hour the Prussians increased in strength. No news of the 3rd corps! It was incomprehensible. Laisné did not mince matters in his explanation. Despatch after despatch had been sent to Marshal Bazaine. Nothing! The scoundrel that he was! He was voluntarily leaving the 2nd corps to be crushed. Du Breuil’s thoughts were too deep for words.

General Frossard finished giving his orders. They caught a few words: ‘Retreat . . . by the ridges. . . .’ The musketry became less intense. Night was commencing to fall. A suffocating heat came from the burning works. And while the

dejected group disappeared in the fog with its platoon escort, Du Breuil watched the day as it died in its immense shroud of mist, stained as though by blood by the sun and the fire.

There was a movement at the head of the troops. A few battalions commenced to retreat. And immediately from the murderous circle of woods, from the heights of the Folster-Hohe came a storm of shots. With renewed force the Prussian attack recommenced.

Two artillerymen helped Du Breuil to carry the wounded Lieutenant to the cart. Schneiber, his hands blackened with powder, threw aside the rifle he had picked up, and leading Poulet by the bridle, the main-road was quickly rejoined. It must have been seven o'clock. A strong wind whistled through the tall poplars. The sinister twilight was gathering.

Every yard the road was strewn with arms, clothing, knapsacks; and as the vehicle jolted over them, the wounded Lieutenant, still in a dead faint, gave forth long sighs, a very low complaint as of a child. Du Breuil finally heard him no more. His ears humming with the decreasing noise of the struggle, his temples circled by an atrocious headache, he furiously ruminated over his powerlessness. On a level with him, moving in the same reflux, a retreating company was plodding along. These men were beaten! Come! There was madness in their eyes. Dog-tired, black, torn, superb—they proceeded still with active step. Beaten! Was it possible? . . . They branched off to the left, reaching the heights.

The cart now moved alongside a file of bare-headed, weaponless, disbanded Light Infantry soldiers. Intoxicated with fatigue and hunger, they sang at the top of their voices:

‘ Le Général Frossard
N'est qu'un sal'rossard !’

They chuckled when they saw Du Breuil's rank. Night had come. Still the cart rolled on, moving by the side of women, carriages full of wounded, waggons and canteen carriages. Du Breuil, cut to the heart, turned round. A shrill, strident cry ground out the words: ‘To Berlin! To Berlin!’ Who was jeering in this manner? With a sobbing laugh the hoarse voice again cried: ‘To Berlin! To Berlin!’ What recollections these words called up! And on the top of a canteen-carriage, its claws fastened with string to its perch, Du Breuil saw a green parrot, bristling all over, screaming aloud and flapping its wings.

A few hundred yards to the right came the crackling of musketry. An indescribable panic, a free fight, a rush to safety amid the cries of stifled women, was the result. Then the red lights of the station came in sight. The terrified crowd crushed into the waiting-rooms; children and old people rushed the whole length of the platform. Long yellow flashes were seen on the Kaninchensberg. Then there was a report, and in the black sky shells burst above the town. Far afield the Styrling ironworks cast immense gleams, and quite near the railway-station the furious musketry was recommenced.

The last train had left. Only an engine remained on the line. Du Breuil requested the station-master to immediately set off; he would travel with the stoker and the driver. The whistle blew. The line was clear. In the midst of cries and maledictions the heavy locomotive commenced to move. Greeted with a storm of bullets, it proceeded at full speed. As it skirted the woods, swarming with Prussians, they peppered it with grape-shot. Forbach, where a few houses were burning, was hidden by a curtain of flame and smoke, and as far as the star-dotted zenith large moving clouds unrolled their ruddy scrolls, spotted with flakes of fire and sparks.

It was a lamentable return, interrupted every minute by stoppages before signals, backward movements along the line, shuntings and danger whistles. The railway-stations were blocked. Between Bening and Rosbrück they met the long file of carriages of an infantry train. In the brief gleam of the lamps the compartments, packed with sleeping men, appeared—faces upon which were expressions of waiting, fatigue, and fever, like those seen in a dream. And as each carriage passed on its way, Du Breuil repeated to himself: ‘Too late! too late! too late!’

Saint-Avoid . . . Faulquemont . . . Courcelles. . . Seated upon a heap of coal, his head buried in his hands, he now wept bitterly, convulsed with sobbing and with a terrible relaxation of his whole being, while the stoker and the driver, moved to pity, looked at him in silence.

Metz—at last! He mechanically took the road leading to the Prefecture. The news of the disaster was known. The cafés were overflowing. The streets were black with people. There reigned an impression of stupor. An anxious crowd had collected before the gates of the building. He crossed the small crowded courtyard and entered the rooms on the ground-floor. He could hardly see the chief of the staff for a moment

and inform him in a few words of occurrences. . . . A piece of news otherwise terrible had just been made known. Marshal de MacMahon had been crushed on the same day at Woerth. The Army of the Vosges no longer existed.

CHAPTER V.

THE night, the morning of the 7th were inexpressible. The state of excitement at the Prefecture and at headquarters was at its height. Men's faculties had been seized with dizziness, and their wills were paralyzed. The two defeats took the proportion of disasters; people imagined they could see the black columns of Prussians invading the country, swarming over it, incessant streams of helmeted foot-soldiers, shining cannon, red-haired cavalymen astride tall, thin horses. Alsace and Lorraine were open at a blow by two gaping wounds.

No more news had been heard of the 2nd corps, except that it was beating a retreat, worn out with fatigue and hunger. MacMahon's defeat was confirmed. He had been crushed. Hardly five divisions against the Prince Royal's ten! He had massed his men on the Froeschwiller heights, covering the Niederbronn outlet, by which the 5th corps was awaited in vain. The third Prussian army, crossing the Sauer, had captured Woerth in the centre, Froeschwiller on our left, and driven the Marshal on Reischaffen. The cuirassiers, to save the retreat, had charged and been annihilated. The vanquished and disunited troops had moved on Saverne. Only one division of the 7th corps, which was shut up in Belfort, was left to protect Alsace. The passes of the Vosges were open to the enemy.

Despatches had poured in in the morning, and people thought they could hear the tocsin of the affrighted towns. Upon the arrival of the fleeing soldiers and stragglers there was a panic at Strasburg, as well as at Verdun and at Thionville. Metz, Verdun, Montmédy, Longwy, Thionville, Bitch, Strasburg, Marsal, Toul and Belfort, were declared in a state of siege. Upon waking up in the morning, the people of Metz were able to read on the walls the telegrams which betrayed the anxiety of the imperial Cabinet. The town was in a state of great agitation; crowds of people swarmed in the streets and on the squares. General Coffinières de Nordeck, appointed Governor,

organized battalions of the National Guard, decided upon the way officers should be appointed, postponed the municipal elections, took steps in regard to the presence of foreigners of German birth. The maddened population clamoured for weapons. There were more than five thousand volunteers. Needle-guns in bad condition were distributed. Sedentary National Guardsmen were sent to the forts to participate with the militia in the supervision of the works, which were being put into a state of defence in great haste. Part of the Emperor's equipages—horses, carriages, and baggage—dashed, in the meantime, in the direction of the railway-station. 'Retreat already, flight soon'—the Châlons saying—passed from mouth to mouth.

As it was decided to pass over to the left bank, Coffinières was ordered to build as many bridges as possible over the Seille and Moselle. Canrobert, who had been ordered in haste to Metz, received a counter-order; Châlons remained the centre for the 6th corps. MacMahon, as well as De Failly, who was disorganized before being beaten, rallied there.

The 3rd and 4th corps commenced to fall back on Metz. In addition to the Guard, they were intact. But that was an additional cause of rancour to everybody. How was it that Bazaine, a responsible chief, had allowed his Lieutenant to be beaten without assisting him? According to some, he was envious of him; he wished, others said, to let him win his Marshal's baton alone. Or did he himself fear attack at Saint-Avold? Whatever was the reason, there was no excuse for his conduct. Things were enveloped in a suspicious light, which allowed of all suppositions. 'It looks as though Bazaine was a traitor!' cried out one of the high personages of the imperial *entourage*. He had doubtless given orders, but too late; and by a singular fatality not one of the three divisions had succeeded in crossing the few miles which separated them from the battle-field. At Sarreguemines, Montaudon, who heard the Sarrebrück guns from noontime, was, however, waiting for orders, set off at four o'clock, and hardly accomplished his movement in the direction of the 2nd corps. Castagny, at Puttelange, marched in the direction of the sound of the cannon, but soon, hearing nothing, stopped and, on the reassuring information of the peasants, retrograded. At five o'clock the cannon roared again, and there was a fresh alarm. Again they set off, and a brigade even entered Forbach in the middle of the night; but the battle had been lost a long time

before. Finally, Metman, who set out from Marienthal, reached Bening (about four and a half miles from Forbach) at three o'clock. At half-past four o'clock a telegram from Frosard summoned him in all haste. He only set off again at six o'clock, and entered the town at nine o'clock to find it already evacuated.

Du Breuil sat thinking, his forehead in his hands, his elbows resting upon his desk. The Forbach cannon still rolled in his ears; the smoke of the batteries was in his eyes; in his nostrils was the acrid smell of powder. A chaos of ardent images assailed him . . . the riderless horse, the little wounded Lieutenant at Styring, the guns carried into safety by the horses at a gallop, the retreat, the rout. . . . His thoughts always returned there. As though the humiliation of so many men was added to his own, he felt that his pride was wounded to the quick. He knew that there were collective griefs, the intensity of which surpassed the worst sufferings of the individual. He felt at that time that he was a Frenchman to the very marrow of his bones. At the thought of the cadenced step of the heavy boots of the enemy upon the soil of his native country, it seemed they were trampling upon his heart. The peaceful Kreutzberg road, with its green thickets, the flies circling round and round, the deep silence, everything which at that moment of waiting, so near the fight, had produced within him the deep love of the country which belongs to one, which one loves and cherishes, because it makes life worth living, and the smallest blade of grass, the least spot of earth of which possesses a thousand indefinite, deep-rooted interests, danced before him. Beaten! What a maddening thought!

And they were retreating without fighting. Ladmirault, Bazaine, Bourbaki, Canrobert, were intact. Châlons, at a blow—Châlons, when they might have made Metz the centre. The army demoralized, and France open to the enemy. He felt himself possessed of all murderous tendencies and the madness of battle. Come, nothing was lost! They would lead these Germans back again. . . . Suddenly his heart was filled with pity. He thought of the Bersheims, of André and Maurice, the Lieutenant of Cuirassiers and the Sergeant-Major of Zouaves. . . . Poor young men!

A hand was laid on his shoulder. Colonel Laune had just called to him without his hearing.

'New movement orders. The troops will be taken to Saint-Avold. The Châlons project is given up.'

Du Breuil looked at him with a stupefied air.

‘Yes,’ continued Laune bitterly. ‘There is no sequence in their ideas, but they are right this time. Retreat was disastrous. There is only one thing to do—fall vigorously upon the enemy with Bazaine, Ladmirault, and the Guard. . . .’ He lowered his voice. ‘To think we have been beaten—beaten with such troops! Because, you know, the arm is strong. It is the head which is weak. . . . We are in need of a man.’

And this officer, who hardly ever opened his heart, confided to Du Breuil that that very morning the first Deputy-Commandant-General, in a secret interview with the Emperor, had begged him to resign the command and return to Paris. The Sovereign refused, as he did not wish to return to the capital except as a conqueror. The revolutionary press was already accusing him of being the cause of the war, and making him responsible for the public misfortunes.

Straightening up his slight figure, and putting on a more self-willed air than ever, as though he was sorry for his expansiveness, he added :

‘Come, let us get to work. This isn’t the time for being downhearted.’

Du Breuil took advantage of a moment’s liberty towards evening to pay a flying visit to the Bersheims. It was raining, and the too frequent unpleasant weather made Metz, with its shining pavements, look still sadder. Part of the flags had been removed from the balconies of the houses. The oriflamme at the top of the cathedral hung down like a large piece of rag. Removing-vans and peasants’ carts were standing on all the squares. Fatigue-duty men, in gray blouses, were passing in the downpour with bent shoulders. A tall, bearded young man in spectacles, a képi too small for him upon his head, and comically hampered by a sword-bayonet, came out of a house and made the military salute.

‘Ah, Major!’ he exclaimed, in a moaning voice.

Seeing Du Breuil’s look of astonishment, he stammered out that he had had the honour of taking luncheon with him at the Bersheims’.

‘My name is Gustave—Gustave Le Martrois. Mme. Bersheim,’ he announced, ‘is very ill. Mother is with her. But there is nothing to prove that her sons are lost. . . .’

On the threshold of the large gate they met Father Desroques, who bowed courteously. He had come for news. Sadness made his ardent physiognomy still more expressive.

'God help us!' he sighed. 'Never has faith been more necessary.'

The glass door of the perron opened, and Bersheim, bare-headed, appeared. Upon recognising the newcomers, he rushed towards them, his face discomposed.

'Have you any news?'

Alas! no. Du Breuil knew nothing. How could he know anything?

Dr. Sohier, in his tight-fitting coat, descended the flight of steps. After shaking hands with Du Breuil, he growled out:

'The calnative is commencing to have effect. Mme. Bersheim must have sleep. Ah! without your mother and your daughter. . . . They are the only reasonable people here.'

Anine in turn came up. Her beautiful eyes were red and circled with blue marks, but her face, by force of will, remained calm. She reminded the doctor of some details for the preparation of an ambulance which her parents were establishing in the old house. They could find room for fifteen beds in two large and three small rooms. It was the duty of the rich to set the example. Because they had sorrow wasn't an argument why they shouldn't do this. They were only doing their duty. Sohier went. 'Geeho! Geeho!' and other shouts were then heard. A cart, to which two white horses were harnessed, entered the courtyard. It was loaded to the height of the first-floor of the house with furniture, packed with mattresses, and surmounted by a cradle. In the hanging compartment under the vehicle coloured plates were knocking up against some kitchen utensils. A peasant, who was sitting on one of the shafts holding the reins and the whip in his hands, jumped down. M. Bersheim recognised Thibault, the son-in-law of Father Larouy, his tenant at Noisseville.

He was a man with a sharp look and smile, his hair and beard curled, and he had a very pronounced limp.

'It's on account of Louise,' he explained. 'She said that, as she is going to be confined, the child would resemble a Prussian if she were so unfortunate as to see a single one. She wished by all means to come away.'

They then observed, seated upon a mattress at the back of the cart, Thibault's wife, heavy by reason of her approaching maternity, her two children—a little boy in breeches, a little girl in petticoats, both rosy and fat-cheeked as apples—at her side.

'Of course I didn't want to see them!' she cried energetically—'savages like they are, who kill the wounded and burn

the houses! The brother-in-law of our uncle Thomas saw them at Wissemburg sticking their bayonets into an officer who was lying in the straw. They are savages—savages!’

The blood mounted to her cheeks, and the children looked at each other as though about to cry.

‘And what of Father and Mother Larouy?’ asked Bersheim, forgetting his sorrow.

‘They wouldn’t hear anything,’ continued the peasant. ‘They say they are too old to move. They will take care of the farm. They send you these fine chickens and these fresh eggs.’

‘Come, now,’ exclaimed Bersheim, ‘we must find room for these honest folk!’

Du Breuil wanted to leave.

‘No, no, I beg of you! Come in for a moment. Anine, see that he doesn’t go.’

She raised her beautiful eyes to him, and smiled with an anxious gravity which moved him. He murmured:

‘I only came to bring you my deepest sympathy.’

She bent her head; a shaft of light struck her thick golden hair, tied into a large tress.

‘Grandmother will be very pleased to see you,’ she said, raising her face.

He followed her. In the drawing-room Mme. Le Martrois was feeling at Gustave’s waistcoat.

‘You must put on a wool under-jacket, my child,’ she said, in an alarmed voice.

Grandmother Sophia, seated bolt upright, her hands clasped on her knees, which were pressed close together, seemed to be frozen, in a posture of sorrowful but valiant immobility. The ruches of her cap trembled when she recognised Du Breuil, for whom she had a great affection. It was a pleasure to him to press her hands, cold and as though worn out. After a few commonplace remarks there was a painful silence. Lisbeth, the old servant, entered the room noiselessly, and whispered into Grandmother Sophia’s ear. The old woman drew from her pocket a bunch of keys, and, a slave to habit, left the room preceded by Lisbeth. In the meantime Mme. Le Martrois was examining Du Breuil’s uniform with a frowning air, and then looking at Gustave, who really did not look very brilliant in his civilian jacket, his gray cloth trousers, and his small cap, which he twirled between his fingers.

‘He will never be able to support military hardships,’ she sighed.

Du Breuil took leave. The young lady held out her hand to him. His feelings were confused. Expressions of hope rose to his lips, but he judged silence was more delicate, and just as expressive. Anine could not misunderstand that.

In the courtyard, Bersheim, who was superintending the unloading of the cart, and who even assisted, with frank good nature, in getting down the cradle, took him by the hands and looked at him with eyes full of distress. His mouth opened, but he was unable to utter a word.

'Come, courage,' said Du Breuil. 'No news is good news. A little patience. We know nothing yet.'

But Bersheim shook his head.

'My wife makes me fear. She has *seen*, she has. You know that mothers have presentiments. . . . That a misfortune has occurred is certain.'

Du Breuil, turning away his eyes, said, 'Be a man!' and left quickly. . . . Yes, a misfortune had come to that house, must have come! Death was in the air. Maurice or André? Perhaps both. . . . And suddenly he thought of his father and mother, their emotion when they heard of the defeats, their sorrow. . . . They must be almost out of their minds with anxiety. . . . And the sweet face of Mme. de Guïonic. . . .

He was entering the offices of the staff, when he met a strange apparition, accompanied by a Colonel and Blache on horseback. Astride a chestnut Barbary horse a little old General with white hair, and old-fashioned képi upon his head, dressed in a coat too short for him, and red, bell-bottomed trousers, was looking to right and left with a still lively and, apparently, indifferent air at the curiosity which he excited.

'Changarnier!'^{*} exclaimed a passer-by.

When the war broke out he had asked to be allowed to serve again, but he had been put on one side. Now they were only too glad to profit by his counsels.

The impression which Du Breuil carried away of the decorous, dry old man, who made him a blunt salute, was one somewhat comic (inspired by his whimsical dress), but mixed

^{*} A brave soldier but a poor general. After the Revolution of 1848 he was appointed Governor of Algeria, where he did the best work of his life. At the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War he asked for a command, which was refused; but he was sent to Metz, where it is said he gave bad advice to Bazaine. He was exceedingly vain. After the War he used to send bouquets of flowers to Mdle. Dosne, the sister-in-law of Thiers, with the accompanying note: 'From General Changarnier, who is not yet a Marshal of France.'—F. L.

with tenderness. He was doing a splendid action, he who was so near death, in giving up the remainder of his life to the army. . . . Du Breuil at once recalled Lacoste in his small bedroom at Saint-Cloud, saying, with religious fervour, that there was no death more beautiful than that on the field of battle, almost hoping for such a death as a reward.

The 9th was a cruel day. The sky was overcast, and the rain never ceased falling. Amplified accounts came in of the Forbach and Woerth defeats. Consternation spread from place to place ; the excitement of two days before gave place to gloomy depression ; one could only meet with downcast faces. The disorder at the Prefecture and at headquarters was tragic. The commotion in Paris made the whole of France tremble, and it was felt at Metz in a series of painful shocks. Telegrams from the Empress Regent to the Emperor and Marshal Leboeuf, sent off under the influence of the emotion produced at the Corps Législatif on the previous evening, begged the Marshal to give in his resignation both as Minister of War and as Commandant-General.

He gave way with injured dignity before the personal entreaties of the Sovereign. But the Emperor only wished to accept his resignation as Minister of War. Bazaine again received an extension of power, an imperial decree conferring upon him the definite command of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th corps. General Manèque was appointed the chief of his staff. General Decaen replaced the Marshal at the head of the 3rd corps. But Bazaine remained a subordinate, and military operations, always wanting in the necessary impulsion, still turned in the same circle of indecision and error.

The Emperor, accompanied by Changarnier, called upon the Marshal at Faulquemont, and disapproved of his project, which was to concentrate on Nancy and Frouard, in view of rallying the 1st and 5th corps. They would await the enemy under the walls of Metz. The 6th corps and the division of African cavalry were definitely summoned there. Instead of guarding Mercy-le-Haut, on the left bank of the French Nied, the army fell back to Seille, under the cannon of the forts. In the meantime three German armies, masked by a dense curtain of cavalry, were advancing. The Chambers in Paris having been convoked, the Ministry fell.

General Comte de Palikao formed another. The Left asked for the appointment of a defence committee to replace the existing powers. Newspapers, representing all parties and all

over the departments, summoned France to take up arms, called for a general rising. The country was in danger.

The immigration of peasants at Metz, in the midst of the rain and the wind, was a sorrowful business. The people thought they could see Uhlan lances in all directions, and, fleeing from their villages, they arrived with that which was most precious to them. The gates of the city were encumbered, and in the streets could be seen files of miserable carts and drays loaded with furniture, household effects, and mattresses, upon which were old people, women and heedless children, sleeping or playing. Behind the carts bellowed a milch cow, attached by a cord, or bleated a troop of sheep, their legs bitten by savage dogs. And the stream still increased, strewing the pavement with bits of straw and dung. The furniture exhibited its lamentable nakedness; cupboards, from the badly-closed doors of which clothes were sticking out, seemed to be already pillaged; straw mattresses and red eiderdowns exposed to the daylight seemed to have something sad about them. The earthen pots and saucepans, looking so humble with their carbonized bottoms, expressed better than anything else the abandonment of the hearth and the familiar roof. It was a grotesque procession which made nobody inclined to laugh. On a fodder cart, in the place of honour, between a dresser and some chairs, a pig was grunting. Further on a cat popped its head out of a basket. Sometimes crockery was broken, to the great despair of the owners. The women especially had sorrowful countenances. Some of them looked out defiantly and with flushed cheeks from under the handkerchiefs which covered their hair; others, with their legs hanging down from the sides of the carts, laughed idiotically. There could be seen savage, stiff old men and women who did not seem to understand what you said to them. They only babbled in dialect. One hard-featured old woman with white headbands, who was walking along with a bundle on her back, looked like a witch. All these people had the same air of stupor and expectancy, an air of resignation to misery which oppressed the heart. Men in blouses also arrived, some enlisting as volunteers, others working at the fortifications.

The authorities were dismayed at such an influx of people. In case of siege all these mouths would have to be fed. On the following day the Prefect and the Mayor issued two decrees, informing the inhabitants of the communes that they would only be allowed to enter the town and reside there on condition

of their bringing with them sufficient food to last at least forty days. But how were these measures, which were, moreover, tardy, to be vigorously carried out?

Tall poplar-trees in the suburbs were felled by the militia, and lay across the roads. Everywhere were empty residences and silent works. General Coffinières ordered all inhabitants within the military zone to pull down their houses. Gardens, villas, country residences, harbours, disappeared under the workman's pickaxe. A small works, built of red brick, showed its side stove in and its chimney cracked. Mud walls again became mud. Bedrooms, open to the day, showed the flowered wall-paper on the walls hanging in strips. To see these ruins and this desolation, one would have said that fire and war had already passed that way. And there was not a protest or a complaint. The last inhabitants, stepping out of the way of the stones, their feet in the water, left without looking behind them. At the cemetery gate a wine-shop kept open some time longer. Some half-drunken militiamen danced there with some common girls to the tune of a fiddler, who, a foraging-cap on his head, scraped away on his violin. It was a grim kind of gaiety in the midst of this melancholiness of inanimate things, in the midst of the fine rain which still fell from a lowering sky.

Steps were taken in regard to the town water-supply. In case the Gorze aqueduct should be cut, the Ponts and Chaussées department had established above the Roches bridge a pump for the raising of the waters of the Moselle into the reservoirs. The Governor issued a decree postponing all proceedings or appeals in the case of writs, bills and promissory notes. The military and civil authorities were all over the place; but the people, instead of being assured, were frightened, and the worst misfortunes were supposed to have happened. The arming of the forts was being pushed forward. Du Breuil met Barrus. He was working with feverish activity. He sneered bitterly as he spoke. . . .

At the Prefecture, on the afternoon of the 10th, Du Breuil saw the officers of the Du Bareil division, who had arrived in the morning. They were being fêted by the imperial staff, taken towards the buffet in one of the large rooms on the ground-floor. The manly, bronzed faces of the Africans obtained everybody's approbation and smile. A cheery voice called to Du Breuil. He recognised one of his friends, Lieutenant-Colonel de la Mause.

'You wish to kill us, then?' he said laughingly. 'We came

from Saint-Mihiel at one bound, by a forced march, during the night. We thought the enemy was there. Your despatch was so urgent. . . .’ And, as Du Breuil looked at him in astonishment, he continued: ‘Now, look innocent! As if you didn’t know that Lebrun and Jarras had had a bet as to the marching powers of the Chasseurs d’Afrique. Well, Lebrun has won.’

A very young Second Lieutenant near them, graceful and scented as a woman, had just introduced himself. It was Roger Langlade. Du Breuil recalled the senator’s wife at the soirée at Saint-Cloud, and the husband in Mme. de Guïonic’s box at the opera. How desirous they were that their son should fight! Had their enthusiasm lasted? He spoke to the young man about his family.

‘Ah, Major, I am too happy to know you. My mother has often mentioned your name.’

He smiled affectedly, showed his white teeth, and assumed a languid look, so as to appear more seductive. This gay young man, full of confidence and in the strength of his youth, thought, as his father had said, that the greater the trouble the more fun there was.

Everybody was thinking about the 1st and 5th corps, which MacMahon had been ordered to concentrate at Nancy. Would they be able to rally the Metz army in time? Supposing the enemy were quicker than they were, and reached Toul and Nancy first, MacMahon and De Failly would be obliged to retreat in a totally different direction. Hearts were wrung with anguish. The superior numbers of the Germans were redoubtable, and their artillery was better than our own. Illusions must be done away with; it was a critical time. With two victories to their advantage, the three German armies were attacking our right flank, threatening the communications with Paris, cutting us off from MacMahon and De Failly. On the morning of the 12th, the presence of the enemy on the banks of the Seille was reported.

The dawn of the 13th broke, and the rain of the last few days ceased. Hour after hour the time went by with the same rapidity, good, false and bad news—only too true was the bad news—flowing in. And no orders came. He could not understand it. The eternal question continually harassed him, What are they waiting for? What is Bazaine thinking about? Although there had been no regular transmission of duties, there could be no doubt that he had been in command since that morning. Why didn’t the general staff which had come under his orders

approach him on the subject? General Jarras, with the whole of his officers, had placed himself at his disposal. The Marshal replied that he would see him in the afternoon when he came to consult with the Emperor; but after he had paid his visit, he set off again in his carriage for Borny without informing him. Jarras went after him. Bazaine, after a few unimportant words, had said, as he was leaving, 'I have no order to give you.' Du Breuil could hardly believe his ears.

Another care weighed upon his mind. How was it that nobody was occupying himself with the points at which the enemy, issuing on to the left bank of the Moselle, could cut off retreat? The inhabitants of Noveant and Ars wanted to know if they had not better destroy their bridges. An officer in the Engineers, who had laid and charged the chambers of mines at the Ars bridge, asked for urgent orders which never came. Why did not General Coffinières draw Bazaine's attention to this question?

His astonishment increased when he met Langlade—how beautifully curled he was!—at the Café Parisien. Langlade gave him an account of the ride of the Margueritte Brigade, which had been sent on the previous evening to Pont-à-Mousson, occupied by the enemy's cavalry.

'First news,' said Du Breuil.

The operation, however, had its importance. The re-establishment of the line opened up the way for the 6th corps, with the exception of its artillery, its engineers, its cavalry, and its administrative departments.

Lieutenant Marquis, coming out of the café like a jack-in-a-box, pounced upon him.

'Do you know, Major, that Marshal Lebœuf is going to be brought before a court-martial, and that Frossard is on the eve of being shot?'

'You are the first to inform me of it,' said Du Breuil indifferently.

Seated on the terrace, Marquis commenced to give some officers of the garrison still more stupefying news. When he invented or lied he always had an admirable accent of sincerity, and could always find credulous ears. When Du Breuil asked him for information about the bivouac of the Lancers of the Guard, and named Lacoste, Marquis cried:

'Lacoste? He was killed by a kick from a horse. I knew him well—a fat little man with a bald head, and troubled with asthma.'

No, that was not a description of Lacoste, and Du Breuil,

reassured, was returning to the offices of the staff, when he met his friend upon horseback. He was sent upon a mission by General Desvaux. He was very sorrowful. His head was bent towards the pavement, and his horse, *Conquérant*, was halting. At the sound of Du Breuil's voice he raised his head, bringing to view his red cheek-bones and his eyes more sunken than before. A sorrowful smile came upon his face.

'And they call that fighting!' he said bitterly. 'Tramping in the mud, because that has been our work since I saw you. Horses foundered and men knocked up only to beat a shameful retreat, as though we were frightened of the rain. The rain and the mud has been our lot for the past week. But the saddest thing of all is the flight of these unfortunate inhabitants.'

Du Breuil understood him. He was thinking of his own people, those poor peasants in the Creuse who were safe and sound, if others were not. Lacoste, lowering his voice, continued with sorrowful enthusiasm :

'Just now I met an old woman—an old woman seated upon a cart. My dear fellow, there are resemblances which positively make one ill. She was pressing a bundle of old linen to her breast. I thought I could see my mother. And we soldiers look at such a sight, and do nothing to repulse the invader! It is sickening! There are times when I wish a bullet was in my head, and that all was over. France is lost!'

'Come, come!' said Du Breuil gently.

'Lost!' repeated Lacoste in a harsh voice. 'You will see—you will see!'

Du Breuil reached the offices with death in his soul. He found that everything there justified his sorrow. An overflow of the Moselle had submerged some of the bridges, carried away others, and covered the fields and the land adjoining the river with water. An enormous amount of work was to be done over again. And the roads, he asked himself, once the army was on the left bank, who would look after them? Why were they not sent to reconnoitre? The most important road was that which, by way of Moulins-les-Metz, ascended a very steep hill, entered the valley of the Mance, and reached Gravelotte, whence it divided into two, both leading to Verdun, the first by way of Rezonville and Mars-la-Tour, the second by Doncourt, Jarny, and Étain.

In the evening orders at last arrived. Headquarters had only to transmit them to the 6th corps, and to the heads of departments, General Manèque having directly informed the 2nd, 3rd and 4th corps and the Guard, which he held under his

hand. It was an inexpressible relief to Du Breuil. They were to be ready to set off on the next day (the 14th) at five in the morning, taking with them provisions for three days, the general commissary of stores taking as many rations as possible, leaving Metz only with the necessary transports for the garrison. Baggage was to be reduced to the smallest limits. Those men who were unfit for active service were to be left behind in the town, and organized in regular detachments. The Metz garrison would, in addition, consist of the depot, the militia, and as the nucleus the Laveaucoupet division, detached from the 2nd corps. Du Breuil eagerly settled down to work, of which there was enough and plenty, so as to kill the last hours of waiting. It appeared to him that to flee from Metz would be the end of a nightmare. He was, however, leaving friends behind him. Poor Bersheims! Would he find time to say good-bye to them?

At the thought of Anine a tumult of confused sensations crowded upon him. He seemed to be living a horrible dream. In a fortnight so many horrible and irreparable things had happened. The fate of the army? The future of Metz? Left to herself, could she hold out against the invaders? And he thought of the Bersheims, as though the heart of Metz and their hearts were one and the same. He suffered when he imagined Anine a prisoner, and Prussian officers glaring in her face. As he was about to leave, Captain de Francastel appeared in a state of great excitement, and announced in a quick voice:

‘We are betrayed! The Prussians have been informed of our retreat. Three rockets have just been seen to go up from the Saint-Quentin slopes.’

Everybody thought of the signals arranged upon by spies. Laune said dryly:

‘Don’t spread such rumours about, and especially with so much warmth.’

Francastel’s light-headedness and his indiscriminate chattering displeased him.

‘I assure you, Colonel——’

Laune had already turned his back. More orders came in. Du Breuil was unable to leave the offices. He passed a feverish night; he hardly got two hours’ bad sleep. As he was washing himself in the morning, Frisch entered the room on tip-toe. He had just fastened the canteen trunks. The horses, he said, were in good trim, and were eager to set off. He had settled

the laundrymaid's bill. Honest Frisch! Never had Du Breuil had a better appreciation of his exactitude and devotion.

'Well, Frisch, we're going.'

Frisch shook his head. He left Metz with regret. Bersheim's pretty servant, with her sweet smile, had made him forget the cook in the Rue de Bourgogne who had given him such good *poulet au blanc*, and chablis with which to wash it down. All the same, he was suffering from the existing humiliation just as much as another, perhaps more than some gallooned boasters.

He was packing some white gloves, the tissue-paper of which had become crinkled, and with his big red fingers was folding up a new pair. Du Breuil again saw himself making purchases before his departure: the auburn-haired girl in the glove-shop, her glances and her smile.

'Give me that pair,' he said to Frisch.

He carried the gloves in his hand when he went to say good-bye to the Bersheims in the morning. It was Sunday, and the weather was clearing up. He called to mind other Sundays in former times, holidays at the École d'Application, the whole of his splendid youth full of strength and hope, and his heart ached as though it had received a deep wound. The town was filling with vehicles and troops. In the direction of the two stone bridges the obstruction was extraordinary: cries, blows from whips, orders, murmurs and complaints, could be heard on every side. Du Breuil heard the uproar echo in the distance with the cadenced step of the soldiers, which shook the pavement and mingled with the rumbling of wheels, the horses' hoofs accompanying the continual uproar with the rhythm of a waterfall. Men, animals, and vehicles rolled on like a river, or stopped still owing to the overflow. Wherever there was an empty space, soldiers slipped into it, forming a compact and living mass.

Du Breuil found Anine and Mme. Bersheim were alone at home. Thibault's little girl and boy were playing in the courtyard. Through an open window he saw some well-made white beds waiting for the wounded. Mme. Bersheim, who wore a dark dress, was making lint. Anine was rolling up bandages. He thought of the two who had disappeared—Maurice and André—and tears started to his eyes. Anine noticed it, and slightly blushed. It was like an exchange of soul between them. A bitter sweetness penetrated Du Breuil. Anine seemed to him to be less a stranger; invisible bonds drew

them together. He could not understand what necessity there was to leave. He contemplated the large light room in which they were working, the baskets of linen, a work-box placed upon the table; all these things seemed so familiar and sweet, as though they only called up peace and rest. The horror of the situation, however, came upon him once more. Anine pricked herself with a needle stuck in her bodice. She sucked the blood from her finger. A drop had stained the linen bandage. Du Breuil turned pale. Everything he felt that minute was poignant, unexpected, singular. He rose; he felt his heart was choking him. Mme. Bersheim opened her arms.

‘Adieu, my dear friend!’

She embraced him like a son, Du Breuil thought: she embraces her own. . . . He begged her to say good-bye for him to Grandmother Sophia and to Bersheim. The two women nodded ‘Yes, yes!’ as though they were in a hurry to see him leave. Anine looked in his eyes, held out her hand to him—that hand so sweet, so plump. He kissed it, and hurriedly left without looking behind him. The vehicles, soldiers, the uproar of the river of tramping beings advancing, drawing back, jostling each other, enveloped and deafened him. Someone whom he did not recognise called out to him. He was a man with a blackened, bronzed face, wearing a red belt round his body, big high boots on his feet, and carrying a stick in his hand.

‘Védel!’ he exclaimed.

Yes, it was his cousin Védel, who was passing with his battalion. The meeting displeased him, notwithstanding Védel’s honest eyes. Taking advantage of a stoppage of the troops, a soldier of the first rank planted himself before him, immobile, carrying arms, a smile upon his face.

‘Maxime!’

Certainly, it was Vicomte Judin, covered with perspiration and dust. Ah! Saint-Cloud was far off now. No dress-coat, no gardenia in his buttonhole, no patent-leather shoes upon his feet, but a soldier’s porringer upon his shoulders, and a piece of bread held in position by the straps of his knapsack. He had a gallant air, all the same, and, of all these men with wrinkled, heavy faces, he was the one who had shaved that morning. It was a brief appearance. A stout Major with a croaking voice swept down upon them, and cried:

‘Forward, Captain—press forward! Close up there, you others!’

It was a human wave, the heads representing the foam.

A brief 'Adieu! good luck!' and Du Breuil found himself alone in the midst of the ever-moving town, under the canopy of dust which floated above interminable carts and waggons—alone, abominably alone.

CHAPTER VI.

HE had been sent to the Île Chambière, to General de Ladmirault, to hurry on the passage of the troops, and he had just delivered his message. The Commander of the 4th corps had turned his powerful face, upon which calm and reflection was stamped, towards him; then, stretching out a short stick above his horse's head, he had pointed out the ponts-volants, over which the infantry of the Lorencez division was defiling in good order.

Du Breuil exchanged a few words with Vacossart, a Captain of the escort, the little red-haired dragoon whom he had formerly hurriedly passed in the lobbies of the Ministry of War, and who was then so joyous he was setting out with the army. He made inquiries about one of their comrades, Comte de Cussac.

'He has just gone up the Saint-Julien slope at a gallop. The Governor's sent him to General de Cissey.' Vacossart added: 'There is need to hurry up. Much time is required.'

'The cavalry has already passed.'

Vacossart exclaimed: 'What dust!'

His sharp eyes, his ruddy cheeks, gave him the appearance of being on fire under his spotted turban helmet, the copper chain of which, fastened tightly, made his bull-dog jaws stick out prominently. Du Breuil was looking at the trembling green water, the swaying of the nearest bridge under the regular step of the foot soldiers; was listening to the noise of the batteries and waggons descending the hill, when a cannon-shot rang out in the distance. Vacossart listened. There came a second shot, nearer, on the left; then another. Faces took an intense and indefinable expression.

'*They are attacking,*' said a Lieutenant, who looked very white. Was it his natural colour?

'At last!' growled another, an old officer whose right eye was lost and whose face bore a scar.

Du Breuil's mare nervously backed into the sides of a trooper's horse which was neighing and trying to bite her. Cannon-shots redoubled in violence. The escort set off. Vacossart, turning round in his saddle, snapped his fingers.

‘Chouette! it's going to be warm!’

Du Breuil thought only of the threatened and retarded retreat. Time had been lost, and the enemy, always on their guard, always prompt, were profiting by it. Victory? Steinmetz driven back; nothing would be better. . . . But during this time Frederick Charles was advancing on the left bank, and cutting off the return on Verdun. He gave his horse the bridle, and Cydalise carried him back. The crowding of the streets of Metz was tremendous, and anxiety was stamped on every face. Official despatches posted up all along the walls reminded him of the Emperor's departure after breakfast for Longueville. He believed he could again see stationed before the Prefecture the squadron of flugelmen, the Cent-gardes, and the imperial carriages. The luggage, the livery servants, the kitchen staff, the provision waggons, had gone on ahead. Seated on one of the vehicles he had recognized the stout Saint-Cloud butler, wearing a waterproof dust cloak, and upon his head a round felt hat. He was looking like a stiff cockchafer. How sad this departure of the Sovereign was! The crowd was silent; there was neither cry nor gesture. The Emperor, pale-faced, talked with his son; Prince Napoleon's grave face compelled one to think, owing to its resemblance to the face of the Other, of ancient and funereal memories, some said of the adieux at Fontainebleau. Some in the crowd said in a low voice: ‘They are fleeing!’

He made some inquiries from a secretary of the staff. General Jarras and his staff, upon hearing the first shot, had jumped into the saddle to rejoin the Marshal. Du Breuil drew off the brown leather gloves, worn by the reins, which he was wearing, and took his white gloves in his holsters. Mme. de Guïonic's opal was in his way. He slipped the ring on his little finger, on the top of the glove. Its reflection was milky and iridescent, the beauty of a changeable and perfidious jewel. Would it bring good luck or misfortune? Bah! he was not superstitious. Déresse was right: the bullet which strikes us is moulded for eternity; the great thing was, to be ready. Then, as Cydalise was galloping towards the Porte des Allemands, the frightened people scampering out of the way, he

conceived the grandeur of the military profession, and raised his thought towards his father, a simple, high-minded soldier. Du Breuil offered the voluntary sacrifice of his life with all his soul. Of course, the vital, supreme instinct made him hope that he would not be killed; but he said to himself, conscious of his littleness, that he was going to plunge into the *mêlée*—a drop of blood, a handful of brains, in the anonymous crowd of combatants: 'May my fate be fulfilled!'

Before he had gone far the wounded appeared, advancing on mules and in carts. One of the men was every minute slipping between the straps of the cacolet, stretching out his legs until they scraped the ground, and from one of his clanking boots flowed a red trail of blood. Those less injured had a feverish and excited air. A Light Infantry officer replied to his salute by a smile, and said: '*They* are receiving a *thrashing*!' Some little soldiers were conversing as though intoxicated with a desire to chatter: 'Then, you understand, I leapt into the ditch, brought my chassepot to my shoulder, and——' Seated upon a bundle of straw was an old artilleryman decorated with medals, holding his pipe in one hand and smoking, his eyes, with an absent look in them, lost in what dream one could not say. His other hand had been shot off, and his arm, temporarily bound up, was bleeding. Other wounded men passed by. 'I should like a bit of something to eat,' said one. 'I'm so thirsty,' said another. A little Montmartre *vitrier* chuckled: 'They gave us some rotten bread this morning.' He winked his eye. 'But there's good white bread at Metz for Bibi.' Almost all of them, even the most downcast, had a resigned air. In the case of some, their manner was grave, others were naïvely childish, as though they experienced an immense relief, a real joy, in fleeing from Death, who was mowing down comrades behind them.

An officer in a blue spencer galloped across the field.

'The Marshal?' cried Du Breuil.

'Over there!'

But before his arm could point out where, the horse stumbled and the officer was thrown against a tree. Du Breuil crossed the embankment and called the infirmary attendants to him. The horseman was raised from the ground. He was only stunned. He remounted his broken-kneed horse and set off again, without thanking anybody. Du Breuil then saw the opal on his finger gaily, almost ironically, sparkle in the sun. . . . Would it bring misfortune? The officer had only turned

his head for a second, but that had been quite sufficient. . . . Good—what an idea! At any other time he would have smiled at it. Cavalry was in movement to his right. He recognised a dark-blue line of dragoons, a light-blue line of lancers—the Guard, a doctor of the International informed him. Bourbaki had just passed with the Light Infantry and the Grenadiers. The Prussians were vigorously attacking Colombey and the Château of Aubigny; our cavalry was destroying them. Small white clouds from the shells could be seen vanishing into the air; the mitrailleuses cracked with a strident, tearing sound.

‘Do you hear?’ asked the doctor. He was humpbacked, hairy, as ugly as a gorilla, and he grimaced, owing to a nervous affection, as though he was rolling nuts in his mouth. But his blue eyes were of an admirable purity.

‘The Marshal?’ repeated Du Breuil.

The doctor removed his cap, upon which was the red cross, to scratch his head with a very long finger-nail, and said:

‘He was seen going in the direction of Grigy.’

Du Breuil dashed forward without hearing what the doctor, with wild gestures, shouted to him. The plateau, intersected with hedges and trees, ascended. A bivouac, abandoned in the morning, was marked out by the round blackened patches where the fires had been, and on the spot where the butchers had worked was a heap of skins and intestines of oxen, covered with flies, the infection of which was being matured in the sun. The whole length of the line of battle, troops were advancing in columns and deploying. A Prussian officer taken prisoner, his head bandaged in a red handkerchief, passed, full of disdain, between some gendarmes. Some canteen carriages, near a clump of trees, were surrounded by some soldiers, who took to their heels upon seeing advancing towards them at full gallop a squadron of Light Cavalry, driving the stragglers towards the battle. Everywhere foot soldiers could be seen to rise from small hills and ditches, like startled sparrows, and disappear. Du Breuil crossed Borny, which was full of troops, but at the moment of striking out on the Grigy road an inhabitant informed him that the Marshal had just gone in a north-easterly direction. Du Breuil turned round and again stopped at the outlet of the village, passing before a park and a château crowded with wounded. They were lying on the borders of the flower-beds, on the lawns, their backs leaning against the old trees. Some honest folk and inhabitants of Metz, surprised

in the course of their Sunday walk, were here, there and everywhere, improvising an ambulance in a large covered room.

He made further inquiries. Contradictory indications sent him on the Colombey road. Bullets whistled. Corpses on their knees appeared to be living. On the collar of the coat of one he read the number of the regiment—the 41st. A shell shattered a small tree a few yards away. The ricochet of a pebble struck his gloved hand, covering the opal with sand. He blew upon it. At that moment a row of soldiers who were in front of him fell back. Five or six fell flat on their stomachs; one of these rose again, ran forward without his helmet, and then fell upon his back. The din was deafening. A feeling of intoxication, a desire to laugh, seized Du Breuil. He tenderly stroked Cydalise and called her 'Beauty.' A company came running up, enveloped him, and passed on. An officer cried out: 'Pas gymnastique!' The soldiers' faces and their brief speech seemed to him to augur well. His heart cried 'Victory!'

Giving his horse a touch of the spur, he dashed forward, having on his right a small fir-plantation. Behind an avenue of poplars some light-infantrymen and soldiers of the line were keeping up a hot fire against the Prussian sharpshooters. When jumping a hedge his mare stumbled. He pulled her up with a sharp jerk of the reins. The animal halted. He uttered a vigorous oath. Cydalise wounded! He jumped from his saddle, but could find no trace of blood. The hoofs? A stone had got between one of her shoes. He dislodged it by means of his penknife, and was nearly killed by a kick. The vicious beast! Good! A bullet coming from afar grazed the crupper. Other bullets whistled past. A pail which was lying on the ground was shot through. Some artillerymen ran up shouting, 'Look out! look out!' A shell whistled and fell with a dull thud into a ditch full of water, which splashed over Du Breuil. He tried to jump into the saddle, but Cydalise reared, overturned him, and, his foot fastened in the stirrup, dragged him along, the nape of his neck bumping the uneven ground. Thus jolted along, he saw the blue sky crossed by a small white cloud; then he closed his eyes, blinded by the sun, dazzling as death. Very fortunately, an artilleryman on horseback, intercepting Cydalise in her flight, caught hold of the reins, and Du Breuil, without knowing how, found himself once more on his feet. No bones were broken. He brushed the dust from his uniform. The beardless artilleryman, a sad-

looking man pitted with small-pox, smiled gawkishly and handed him the reins.

‘Thanks.’

The saddle had slipped, so he tightened the girth. Then he raised himself into the saddle on his wrists, and once more astride, he wrathfully pulled at the mare’s mouth and gave her the spur. The little soldier appeared astonished, and a look of reproach came into his gray eyes, which were without eye-lashes. Du Breuil recollected that he owed his life to him.

‘Your name?’ he cried, turning round.

The other shouted it to him, but his horse carried him towards the moving battery. Du Breuil could not catch it. This lost name pricked his conscience. The opal ring still shone on his finger. He comprehended the full extent of the danger which he had run, and became alternately hot and cold in the small of his back. Really, he was not superstitious. Had it not been . . . He had the feeling of humiliation which every admirable horseman has who is thrown. And the look in the small soldier’s eyes—that look of astonishment and reproach. . . . His heart suddenly softened towards Cydalise, and he asked her forgiveness: the poor animal was bleeding. Some drums rattled furiously. He skirted a line of troops, and saluted a General. An officer said he had seen the Marshal’s escort pass a few moments before. The Prussians were advancing on the Sarrelouis road.

Five minutes afterwards Du Breuil joined the squadron of Light Cavalry of the escort, and found his comrades again. Décherac smiled at him; he was always smiling, a proceeding which upon many occasions might appear *banal*, but which under fire assumed a sort of grace and courage. How mistaken one could be in one’s previsions upon such and such a character! Honest Lieutenant-Colonel Poterin, who in appearance had so little of the hero about him, faced danger with admirable good nature. And that *mauvais singe* Floppe was courageous also; he kept raising himself in his stirrups with an air of manly bravado. Black-haired Massoli was green, and the brilliant Francastel tried to offer less surface to the enemy’s shots by leaning sometimes on his hostels, sometimes on his stirrup-straps, under the vain pretext of adjusting himself.

The Marshal passed near them. Du Breuil looked at him. What was trouble in the presence of the man who held in his hand the destiny of the army, in the presence of the chief who

had been raised to this pinnacle of honour by public opinion? Bazaine, thick-set, heavy, and firm in his saddle, possessed a strong face, the first impression of which puzzled one, so inaccessible to emotion did his features seem. The Marshal's legendary impassibility, in fact, seemed not only to brave danger, but also to abolish it. Bullets rained around him without his noticing them; he rode from one point of the battle-field to the other as though in his garden.

Aides-de-camp, estafettes, came running up, and again set off. There was nothing so moving to look upon as this feverish excitement and this disorderly rushing about. Everything converged towards this stout old man with gold epaulettes. He seemed to direct his battle without having a taste for it, simply because he was there and because it was expected of him. Du Breuil heard him give some orders to a Colonel.

'Let the attack be repulsed, but do not let the troops become involved ahead. As soon as the fight is over the retreat will be resumed.'

That was what was to be feared—a considerable loss of time. Steinmetz was detaining us, so as to permit of the advance of Frederick Charles. In what way, therefore, would victory benefit us? . . . Time, opportunity, was always a stumbling-block!

They moved in the direction of his escort, the commander of the 3rd corps, General Decaen, who, ahead and without escort, was tranquilly observing the enemy's movements under the storm of canister-shot. Blood ran from his right leg, the knee of which was shattered by a bullet. Two staff officers fell wounded at his side. He refused to leave the battle-field, and resisted the earnest entreaties of his Aide-de-camp. Suddenly his horse was shot dead, and he was thrown to the ground. This time the Marshal intervened, and obliged the General, who was bruised all over by his fall, to withdraw. Du Breuil was pursued by the vision of the wounded man, the dismayed Aide-de-camp, and the bustling of the cavalymen of the escort. The expression of these faces moved with emotion, and General Decaen's stoicism, had brought into prominence the supreme grandeur of this little group. High is the prestige of a wounded man; loss by death is keenly felt by every soldier. Death is energy slipping away, and sometimes the courage of the men is lessened by it. General Metman took command, and he also had his horse killed under him.

‘Du Breuil!’ called Laune.

And Du Breuil, his attention at its full stretch, found himself in the presence of the Marshal, who spoke to him in a somewhat shrill voice, but with an expression of kindness in it, and fixed upon him the indecisive look of his brown eyes, a distant look which revealed nothing. He despatched Du Breuil to the Guard, which was to isolate itself in its passive rôle of a supporter.

Upon arriving near the Light Infantry division, a General, who had got down from his horse to stretch his legs, turned towards him his yellow, wolf-like face, ready to bite, and said:

‘What do you want?’

It was Boisjol. He was in a very bad humour. When he heard that, far from calling him to the front, he was ordered to remain where he was, his face took an expression of sadness. He growled that his soldiers were becoming demoralized to no advantage at the sight of the constant procession of wounded soldiers, crying out and groaning. When Du Breuil reached the Cuirassiers further on, he caught sight of the enormous Couchorte, at the head of his squadron, biting his moustache. At the sight of Du Breuil’s gold shoulder-knots, he could not restrain himself any longer. Pushing forward upon his colossal horse, he cried out in a stentorian voice:

‘Well, what’s the news? Are we at last going to charge?’

Du Breuil shook his head, and left Couchorte in a state of apoplectic indignation. Bourbaki was passing in the distance with his escort of Empress’s Dragoons. Du Breuil came up with him, accomplished his mission, and returned under fire. An officer overtook him when jumping a ditch. His face was pale.

‘Is that you, Décherac?’

‘I’ve come from the Borny farm. Wounded are in a shed; the château park is full of them, and the village also.’

‘I’ve seen them,’ said Du Breuil.

‘Your friend is there, that stout Metz gentleman with a beard. His name has a Heim in it.’

‘Bersheim? How’s that?’

‘He came with a Jesuit father to fetch the wounded in his wagonette. Are you going that way?’

‘No,’ replied Du Breuil, pricked with a sudden regret at not being able to see Anine’s father and shake the brave fellow by the hand.

Without another word they spurred on their foam-covered

horses, and returned by the shortest cut to the lines, enveloped in smoke. When they rejoined the escort, the Marshal, seeing the enemy's infantry again concentrating, himself brought into action a battery of mitrailleuses. The destructive fire opened under his very eyes. A storm of shells fell upon the battery in return, and quite tranquilly the artillerymen could be seen feeding their 'coffee-mills.' Du Breuil could not take his eyes off the nearest gunner, a swarthy little Provençal with a goat-like profile, who worked his gun with prompt movements, with the agile grace of an animal. All his attention was riveted on the big, shining cannon; he looked at it as though fascinated; he seemed to be connected with it by invisible bonds. One felt that each discharge was a delight to him. The whole battery belched forth its bullets with a dry rattle. Du Breuil was exalted by such a power of destruction. He felt a murderous desire to see men and horses fall, to see the blood spurt and the brains dash out. What was life at such a moment? Death only was sublime. . . . Suddenly the Marshal reeled. They rushed towards him. A splinter of a shell had struck him on the left shoulder; his epaulette with five stars had been torn, and deadened the blow. He continued to calmly give orders, and remained ten minutes longer under fire.

'He has escaped finely to-day,' murmured Restaud. 'A short time ago he raised his képi to salute upon hearing of the death of a Colonel, and a bullet grazed his head.'

They again set off. A state of fever once more agitated Du Breuil. The gallop choked him with dust, and made his nostrils tingle with saltpetre. He looked around him, and could only see nightmare visions—scarlet cloth, red blood, blue great-coats, blue smoke, earth, sky, green trees snipped by bullets; then, everything which was lying on the ground consisted of a puddle, a stain or débris; the great stiff carcasses of horses, caisson wheels, knapsacks ripped open, pouring forth their poor contents. Dead men haunted him, some lying in a heap, others lying out flat. Seen? When and where? They were unforgettable. Twenty were stretched out with their faces to the ground, elbow to elbow, the stocks of their rifles to their shoulders, and all round about were rivulets and little dark splashes of blood.

The sun had set. The twilight came. The battle still continued. A strange feeling of tiredness, which may be compared to the leaden sleep which follows insomnia, gradually came upon

him. So much horror filled him with a kind of stupidity. He moved from one end of the *mêlée* to the other, mechanically carrying out his duty. He no longer experienced a human feeling, but came and went here and there, sleeping with open eyes. One time he wiped his face, upon which the warm blood of Restaude's wounded horse had spurted. He heard it recounted at his side that the enemy was everywhere repulsed, and that the Ladmiraute infantry had just made a fine bayonet charge. 'Ah!' he exclaimed. Then he learnt that the retreat was going to be continued. Everything was the same to him. He saw night fall, and was revived by the freshness of the air. If he had been able to express a wish, it would have been to dip himself into fresh water—the river baths, the pretty stream which flowed in the Brittany park of the Guionics . . . the Opéra, the opal bracelet. . . .

'We return!' exclaimed a comrade to him.

What! return to Metz? Why? It was true, war! France was in danger. Retreat on Verdun? It all seemed very strange to him. The air was really fresh. Some wounded men in a ditch groaned. They were, then, victorious? He was astonished to hear the roar of the cannon become lower. There was even, suddenly, a deep silence, broken only by a thousand humming noises, a thousand sighs and confused complaints, like a great death-rattle.

Du Breuil shivered. Massoli and Francastel had just had their names called out; his was called out in turn. He had to carry the order to the 3rd division of the 3rd corps to set off again as soon as possible. He was troubled by this voice which spoke to him out of the darkness. It was very dark, but the moon shed her pale light upon the battle-field.

He moved towards Borny. Great red lights in the distance indicated burning farms. Cydalise was tired, and stumbled, each time that she did so uttering a little groan. Suddenly a horse which was lying across a road rose to its feet, snuffed the wind, neighed, and approached on three legs limping, its entrails flowing from its side. Du Breuil was seized with such a pity that he placed his hand on his revolver to put the animal out of its misery. But he lacked courage, and rode on, leaving the poor beast to finish dying. The freshness of the night penetrated him more and more, revived his emotion, re-awakened his soul to a sense of the atrocity of things. A corpse with a white face was laughing there under the moon. There could be heard the dull tramping of horses, the rhythmical

step of foot soldiers, and could be seen dark forms, a moving throng of men, their tin porringers shining upon their backs.

He arrived before the Borny farm, where an ambulance was established. An officer of the Engineers belonging to the staff of the 3rd corps, who was trying in the darkness to fasten his horse to one of the racks in an empty stable, asked him if he had had anything to eat. Upon receiving a reply in the negative, he said :

‘I’m going to see if I can find some food for my comrades.’

On the way he related what he knew : the enemy had been repulsed ; it was a success all along the line. The deserted and silent village was wrapped in darkness ; in only one window was there a light. Some soldiers knocked at the window-panes, in vain asking for bread and water. The officer of Engineers joined them. Du Breuil continued to advance. Everything was in movement at the château ; the ambulances were in full swing, and frightful cries could be heard. Du Breuil went outside in search of General Metinay. That took some time. When he had found him he returned to the château. Was it in hope of meeting Bersheim ? He again saw the officer of Engineers, proudly carrying a knapsack on his back.

‘I’ve got some provisions,’ he said. ‘The doctors of the International gave them me. Will you have some bread ?’

Du Breuil thanked him.

‘Don’t go in there,’ advised the officer, ‘unless you have a stout heart.’

And he went his way. Silent troops passed, and orders were given in a low voice. They were retreating.

To fasten his horse to a tree, and carry her an armful of fodder from a heap of straw near the dead body of a Light Infantry officer, were unconscious, mechanical acts. A group of sub-commissaries and doctors were conversing in the midst of the coming and going of infirmiry attendants. Metz men, a Dominican and some chaplains were there. Nobody took any notice of him. He experienced a little start by nearly stepping upon a wounded man who was lying on the border of a flower-bed. He leant down. A cloud passed before the moon. The light returned ; he saw the face, and thought he recognised it.

‘Vacossart !’

The dragoon looked at him. His coat was open, and his shirt was soaked in blood.

‘Vacossart!’ he repeated.

The man looked at him with glassy eyes, in which the faculty of recollection was indefinite, lost in space. Du Breuil knelt by his side and looked around for a doctor. A priest came to him, and by the pallor of his face and his black eyes he recognised Father Desroques.

‘Poor fellow!’ said the priest. ‘I have administered the sacraments to him.’ He added: ‘He neither sees nor hears you. God in His infinite mercy has received him.’

Du Breuil then recognised that he had spoken to a dead man. Poor Vacossart! How had he come to die there? A bullet in his heart? How boyishly he had snapped his fingers, delighted to fight! Du Breuil upon rising felt his glove was sticky. He pulled it off. The opal was smeared with blood. He wiped it, but did not place it on his hand again. Screams arose. The doctors were operating quite near.

‘Bersheim?’ he asked.

‘He has already set off with a cartload of wounded. He will probably return.’

Without knowing why, Du Breuil then entered the charnel-house, a stable from which the litter had been removed. Fresh straw, which had been taken from a neighbouring barn in the absence of the owners of the château, all the doors and locks of which were fastened, had been laid down. The only light was from two candle-ends placed upon a window in a little corner, near a carpenter’s bench, upon which they were amputating arms and legs, sewing up intestines, searching with big pincers in deep wounds. Wounded men were lying on the ground, death-rattles could be heard, the naked flesh resembled butcher’s meat; and then there was the smell of human flesh and the cutting up of limbs, which an infirmary attendant carried out to be thrown away. He could not stand it, and fled from the stable, only to breathe when he was outside. Cydalise had not touched her fodder. He spoke to her softly, his heart filled with bitterness. With a great longing for tenderness he put his arms round her neck and kissed her upon the nostrils.

A commissary of stores arrived. The ambulance must be evacuated. Troops were retreating from all sides. Du Breuil found himself alone in the open country. Clouds still passed before the moon, and their shadows moving over the dead gave one the impression that they were living. The air was calm and very pure. What an abominable, sickening sight this

stableful of wounded men, the candle burning itself out, the red carpenter's bench, a doctor leaning over an open stomach—a doctor attentive and patient! . . . Only then did his face, the hairy mask of a gorilla, appear before Du Breuil and haunt him. Yes, it was the doctor whom he had met at the commencement of the battle, the man with such pure blue eyes. And Du Breuil for a minute could not drive the vision away or flee from it, just as though it was over his own bleeding stomach that the gorilla was leaning, working away with his long fingers.

A vehicle attracted his attention. Groans came from it. Around him he saw forms going hither and thither, and every now and then leaning down. Some infirmiry attendants and a chaplain were searching for other wounded men and lifting them on to the cacolets. He continued to advance. A man, who was holding a carriage-lamp to the ground, rose to his feet. It was Bersheim. A peasant was by his side.

'You!' cried Du Breuil, startled.

'Who is there?' asked Bersheim fearfully, like a man who does not expect to be recognised. He raised the lantern, trying to make out who it was.

'It is I—Du Breuil.'

'You! Ah, friend!' He turned towards the peasant and held out the lantern to him. 'Take hold, Thibault. Bring the cart round; there are some wounded here.'

The light, jolted up and down by the movements of the lame man, moved away, giving one so sad an impression. Du Breuil trembled. Bersheim took him by the arm.

'Listen!'

Very low, very feeble complaints, with which inarticulate words and weak cries were mingled, followed the succouring light. The wounded saw it disappear, and with a supreme effort stretched towards it—an effort which did not even have the effect of raising an arm or a head, which hardly moved the lips, which found expression in a long cry of appeal.

'This way: come, come . . .' whispered these breathless mouths.

Oh, that death-rattle of dying men—so low, so low! It made Du Breuil's heart bleed.

'Yes, yes!' cried Bersheim's fine voice into the darkness. 'Yes, yes, my friends.'

But the dying, as if they had given up hope, were now silent; and Bersheim, his eyes full of tears, said to Du Breuil:

'I cannot see any longer. All these poor fellows! . . . it is terrible!'

Then, as they stumbled forward a few steps—the moon having just disappeared—and as they heard the creaking of the wheels of the wagonette, the voice of a foreigner issued from the hollow of a ditch:

'Camarates!'

Both had the same idea, the same feeling. Without a word, without looking, they passed on.

The voice again cried in a supplicating tone:

'Oh, camarates! camarates!'

The accent was so poignant that the two Frenchmen stopped. A pale face, that of a red-haired Christ, came to view in the light of the lantern; clasped hands were stretched out; they saw the soldier's gashed and bleeding neck. Bersheim began to tremble, and spoke very low and very quickly, as though in a fever fit.

'I cannot. There are Frenchmen. It's not my business to pick up enemies——'

There was a brief silence. In the presence of this white face, discomposed by fear and suffering, Du Breuil was overcome by a new, until then unexperienced, confused sensation, one of intense emotion. Nothing was left in him of the blind rage which he had formerly felt when he imagined the face of the Enemy with his ruddy complexion, hard blue eyes, and tawny beard. And the feeling of hatred against the stirring, impersonal masses of the enemy was also gone. An indefinite feeling of fraternity seized him. His heart was drowned in an irresistible flood of human compassion, and he only saw before him an unfortunate man.

The Prussian looked upon them with eyes dilated by a great hope. His features were exalted. His smile would have softened stones.

'My God!' groaned Bersheim.

And Du Breuil saw distinctly that he dare not help this German before him because of himself, an officer, so many of whose comrades and unknown brothers were lying *pêle-mêle* bleeding there. He was seized with a sudden feeling of anguish. What a pity this butchery! This Prussian was a man!

'Take him,' he said in a low voice.

'Yes, yes,' said Bersheim. 'Thibault, assist me.'

'Thank you, thank you, camarates!' repeated the wounded man. He made an effort to rise, but blood spurted from his mouth. They let him fall. He was dead.

Du Breuil, overcome with disgust, could not say how he left Bersheim. It seemed to him that he left him walking about with his lantern suspended over the faces of the dead, touching their cold cheeks, searching for wounded; but he was not sure. Alone, upon the back of Cydalise, who walked with fatigued step, he proceeded towards Metz. Other burning villages flared out on the heights of the plateau. In the direction of Noisseville could be heard cheers, and the distant strains of a German band, like to a song of victory. Our tramping troops, men, horses, and cannon, slowly continued their retreat. The moon had disappeared. In her place one, two, three, four, and then a whole multitude of stars shone out, blossomed in the sky, pure, fresh, eternal.

He thought of the thousands of dead men stretched out, whose eyes were closed to this splendour—thousands of bodies which had been men like himself, but which were now inert masses of flesh. He thought of the wounded, the appalling horror of the wounded; the feeble death-rattle which he had recently heard seemed to him to still sweep along the plain, and everywhere were corpses; the roads, houses, fields, and woods were full of them. He could see nothing but corpses lying flat upon their stomachs, upon their backs; in furrows and in ditches were stiffened, bloody corpses—nothing but dead men in heaps.

The stars still shone brightly in the black azure. He almost cried out with sorrow. Why, why this idiotic carnage? An imperceptible breeze blew. The stars twinkled. Never had they been more beautiful.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

A RAY of sunlight filtered underneath the door. In the cool passage of the small private house was a smell of damp linen and preserves coming from the cupboards. Du Breuil, badly awakened from a short sleep, hardly responded to the greetings of his hosts. They were old people, M. and Mme. Poiret—tradespeople of the town, who for some years had lived in retirement in this village of Moulins, at the gates of Metz. Anguish had made their voices shrill and their hands tremble. They looked upon the altered face, the dusty clothes, of this officer who had just slept one night under their roof, of this transient stranger whom they would doubtless never see again, and then they sadly turned away their eyes. What had to-morrow in store for them? What worry or grief? And both thought of their poor wrecked life, of the invasion that was imminent. Every moment they peeped out from the side of the window and listened.

A great and continued noise came from the road. Du Breuil, still deafened by the tumult of the previous day, listened with disquietude to this confused uproar—a distant murmur of cries, oaths, and calls. When the door was opened, he was seized with astonishment. Between the houses, the human river, reaching from bank to bank, flowed on, carrying with it a prodigious accumulation of vehicles comparable to wreckage.

As far as the eye could reach, in front and behind, could only be seen waggons closely packed together, ambulances painted gray, canteen-carriages painted green, artillery caissons, fodder carts, ammunition-waggons loaded with oats and provisions—an unprecedented agglomeration, an endless defile of vehicles, from an old-fashioned peasant cart to drags and

breaks. Some were half empty, others were full to overflowing. Carters cursed and swore. Some estafettes in vain tried to open up a way. Soldiers belonging to every branch of the army painfully proceeded upon their way, mingled and in confusion, between the spaces. Here was a battery of artillery, the guns separated one from the other by carts loaded with sugar; there was a pile of wounded, with pale faces, blood-stained linen, groaning at each jolt of the cacolets. Everywhere was disorder, hustling, an ever-renewed confusion—sudden stoppages, laughter, complaints, blows from whips, and, in the midst of the hubbub of this moving crowd, the sun and the azure, but a sun which was already so hot that it made the perspiration roll down red faces, an acrid dust fouling the fresh azure.

Du Breuil's heart was oppressed. This road, upon which the whole army was crowding, reminded him of that at Forbach; this morning retreat reminded him of the evening panic. His brief joys of the previous day, the minutes of intoxication when the mitrailleuses rent the air, and when his heart cried victory, filled him with horror. He continued to feel the immense disgust which he had experienced at night in the presence of the corpses, the same sickening sensation, but deeper and sadder. And mingled with his disquietude was a fear that this so-called victory was in reality but purely ineffectual butchery. Success? It might be, but it was worse than a defeat. The march upon Verdun was retarded, perhaps compromised by it. If Prince Frederick Charles's army outstripped them, they would be obliged to fight again, and in a position of flagrant inferiority.

Every minute's delay was an opportunity lost. The army, which up to the present had been stagnant, had now to hastily retire—to flee by every route. Or else it would have to resolutely face Steinmetz's army, inferior in number, crush it, and turn against that of Prince Charles. But nothing was more disastrous than the slowness of the retreat. Instead of allowing this long string of one hundred and seventy-five thousand men, and the carriages, munitions, and baggage which the army dragged after it, to pour into this single road, it would have been better to keep the general convoys and the auxiliary carriages behind—above all, to have made use of various routes.

He smiled bitterly as he thought of the guilty indifference of certain chiefs. In changing the command, had they not simply replaced a one-eyed man by a man who was lame?

He was troubled at the recollection of the hostility which had been manifested between Bazaine and his staff from the very first. Ought not Jarras, in the presence of the Marshal's attitude, to have immediately withdrawn instead of clothing himself in a wounded silence? Was the fear of not finding work which would compensate him an excuse for dispensing with a confidence which they did not show in him? What a deplorable thing at such a time was this persistence in misunderstandings, this incompetency, and this indifference! Ought not each one to have raised himself above meannesses of character, and have done his duty—more than his duty? If General Coffinières, the head of the Engineers, had brought about orders to destroy the Ars, Novéant, and Pont-à-Mousson bridges, if orders from high quarters had been interpreted by General Jarras in the broadest sense instead of being carried out to the letter—would not the army at this time have been out of danger? would it not have started off again in good order on the various ways leading to Verdun? But nobody troubled himself. All isolated themselves in their limited sphere of action, satisfied if they felt they were screened by another's responsibility.

Francastel was passing on the causeway. He had regained possession of his fine assurance.

'Good-morning, Major,' he cried.

They walked in the direction of headquarters. The offices were situated, as well as possible, in the house where General Jarras had slept. Francastel was freshly shaved, wore a tight-fitting light-green pelisse with small shining buttons, and carried his head high under its black talpack. His sword trailed along the pavement. Du Breuil for the first time noticed an eyeglass, which further emphasized the habitual air of brag on his physiognomy.

'What a victory, Major! We gave them a rude lesson. My word! there were moments when it was warm.'

Du Breuil, calling to mind the bragger leaning on his holsters, kept silent. Francastel, encouraged, continued with an air of modesty:

'Each did his duty. You know that yesterday at Longueville, where the Emperor was putting up, we dismounted for a minute? The Marshal gave an account of the fight. It appears that His Majesty, holding out his hand, said: "Well, M. le Maréchal, you have, then, broken the spell!" The *entourage* joined in the chorus.'

There was a great hubbub in the room where the majority of the officers of the staff were assembled. They were awaiting the return of General Jarras, who had just gone to Bazaine for his instructions. With wild gestures some were explaining the missions which they had fulfilled, and were silent neither on the subject of the dangers they had run nor their adventures; others were commenting upon the rôle of the leaders. With an ill-will which was natural to the latter, they judged all of them with extreme severity, though a great success—Massoli even murmured a triumph—had been gained. The majority saw in this success the turning of the tide, and allowed themselves to be filled with boundless hope and blind confidence.

Restaud ejaculated:

‘It is a triumph for which we have had to pay, and which will cost us dear.’

Du Breuil thought of the death-rattle of the wounded, the pallor of the dead. The terrible vision, with the fields strewn with corpses, again rose up.

‘From four until eight o’clock the battle by no means dragged,’ said Restaud. ‘The 3rd and the 4th corps had their work cut out.’

‘The losses?’ yelled Floppe.

‘Three or four thousand men.’

‘And General Decaen?’

‘Wounded only. And poor Kelm!’

‘Well?’ exclaimed Du Breuil.

‘Bullet in his head.’

‘Kelm was a fatalist to the end. When galloping towards Borny he said to Décherac: “If I am killed you will take my pocket-book.” He added: “I’m certain to be killed.”’

There was a silence. They passed to other names, but they were mentioned in the midst of general indifference. Each, with dry eyes, was thinking of himself and of his connections; the best, who were capable, like Du Breuil, of being moved before such a spectacle as that of the previous night, were overcome with sorrow, and remained insensible to the trepidation of the present.

Floppe continued:

‘Ah! dead men’s shoes are good things. There is Marshal Lebœuf provided for!’

Francastel placed Du Breuil in possession of the facts. The Emperor had immediately appointed the ex-Minister to the command of the 3rd corps in succession to General Decaen.

'This time,' stated Floppe precisely, 'he has got just what he wants.' Compressing his lips, he added: 'Don't let us force our talent. . . .'

Laune appeared, followed by Décherac, who was saying to him:

'At two o'clock in the morning some of the divisions were still on the road.'

'I know—I know,' exclaimed Laune dryly. He turned towards the window, from which could be seen the ceaseless tumult on the road, and growled: 'This obstruction could not be greater.'

The mission which Du Breuil received half an hour afterwards gave him fresh confidence. He hastily scribbled in his pocket-book the order to the 4th corps—'to immediately set off again, and, as soon as possible, reach the points fixed upon.' Under the dictation of General Jarras the words came to have a reassuring meaning. The chief's mind was on the alert. Others, like Du Breuil, were going to carry varying orders to the 2nd, 3rd, and 6th corps; and the immense scattered body of men, obedient to the mute voice, would immediately form again, follow certain routes, and converge towards a fixed point.

Frisch, apprised by an orderly, was leading Brutus by the bridle up and down before the door. Du Breuil gave the chestnut a friendly pat under the belly and looked to the girth.

'Has Cydalise eaten?' he asked, as he fell into the saddle.

Frisch smiled with an air of satisfaction.

'Yes, sir. She refused her oats early on, but this morning she's made up for lost time. Her hoofs are very swollen.'

'Rub them with camphorated alcohol.'

'There is none left, sir; but I wrapped her hoofs in wet flannel.'

'Honest Frisch! he has a great affection for his horses,' thought Du Breuil, as he opened up a way. A regiment of the line was following with open files the two sides of the road, over which there still rolled the composite body of vehicles. Brutus, disquieted at this unusual tumult, pricked up its ears and gave forth short snorts. This solid Normandy horse had more stamina than Cydalise, and also more character. This taste for fine animals was one of Du Breuil's little vanities. He had always had admirable mounts, loving the horse for itself. But since the opening of the campaign, Cydalise and Brutus had become to him still dearer—true companions united

to his life, the emotions and fatigues of which they shared. A good horse in time of war is invaluable.

He now descended the Longueville road, proceeded twenty yards, stopped, and then set off again. Followed by an orderly, a small cavalry soldier on horseback, whose gaze he felt riveted on his back, he skirted the long files of tramping men—soldiers of the line belonging to the Lafont de Villiers division. Bent under their knapsacks, their guns slung across their shoulders, they stared at him with resigned faces, some jovial, others impassible. Their features were drawn, their cheeks were hollow like those of galley-slaves, who eat not and hardly sleep; their uniforms were white with dust, their faces young, their hands black. As he was passing he recognised his cousin Védel, and, in the ranks, Vicomte Judin wearily dragging his feet along. He only had time to exchange a look and a smile.

The immense river still flowed along the road. To the great despair of a crimson-faced baggage-master, who, voiceless, was wildly gesticulating, his eyes starting out of his head, some auxiliary convoy carriages, loaded with officers' baggage, had slipped between the vehicles of a regular commissariat convoy; and the waggons full of biscuit, the ammunition waggons, were drawn up to an endless extent, *pêle-mêle* with canteen-carriages, ambulances and carts, upon which were pyramids of trunks. Whole batteries, standing still, reserve artillery parks, and squadrons of soldiers, could be seen far into the distance, caught in the eddy of the almost motionless current. It was impossible to move to the right or the left, to advance or to move back. They were fixed there. It was necessary to wait until those in front moved on. In the midst of oaths, laughter and songs, mingling into a single tumult, the appalling throng rolled on in the midst of the perpetual agitation of stoppages and departures. A gray cloud floated above the road, and even became larger. The sun in the full azure poured down its heat. Du Breuil coughed, the thick dust and the acrid odour of this perspiring crowd choking him.

When near Scy, the church towers of which appeared among the trees, he saw, as he turned his eyes to the right, on the slope of Saint-Quentin towards the plain, an escort of Light Cavalry. It was coming towards him, and on the opposite side of the road. A tricolour fanion waved above it.

He raised himself in his stirrups. Ahead of his staff, which proceeded in Indian file, was a corpulent General, whom Du

Breuil recognised, from his big nose and large drooping moustache, to be his chief of the previous day, the ex-Minister. A momentary feeling of compassion came over him. Poor Marshal Lebœuf! After having been the great master, the director of the army, to be reduced to coming to salute a comrade who had obeyed him on the previous day, in *his* turn to obey. It was hard. But the General's face retained its heavy, indifferent look, and revealed nothing.

Pooh! Why pity him? He was only too happy in his disgrace. All the incapable ones ought to be put to the sword. Everybody according to his deserts. . . . He also thought what a splendid thing this military discipline was, after all, this inflexible rule which controlled each one from the humblest soldier to this Marshal of France, who yesterday had still been supreme chief.

Behind the Marshal, in his proper place, was Blache, his red face more smiling than usual. Those fierce eyes of a wild-boar of his were lit up with satisfaction. The pleasure of resuming duty, said Du Breuil to himself. He liked Blache's rugged qualities, knowing him to be courageous and devoted under his blunt exterior.

A great uproar dragged him from his reflections. Turning his head, he saw a red-haired carter, a gigantic brute of a man (he knew that figure) who was fighting on the side of the road with another convoy driver, whose vehicle had become entangled with his own. The men were separated. The convoy, his chest stoved in by a blow from a fist, was left for dead in the ditch. The immense river, momentarily stopped, again rolled on, carrying with it a vision of the red-haired carter, his heavy vehicle disengaged by a shove from the shoulder, and of the neighbouring carriage henceforth without a driver.

There was a shout behind him: 'Get out of the way!'

A fresh escort arrived at a gallop from Moulins and passed him. It was Marshal Canrobert, followed by his Aides-de-camp. He was going at full speed. Du Breuil had only time to see his manly profile and his hair floating in the wind. What was the matter? The orderly officers cast anxious looks to their right as they passed. He scrutinized the plain, and then suddenly perceived a confused stir on the heights of Montigny, about two or three thousand yards away on the other side of the Moselle.

The enemy, doubtless. We had no troops on the right bank. . . . He took his field-glass, and distinctly saw the stirring of

compact groups of men. Artillery or cavalry? He was seized with a sudden feeling of anger. Those cursed Prussians! Thus to advance under the guns of the fort. . . . They were mad! He guessed, however, they would be dislodged. He bitterly acknowledged the pertinacity of their spies; they never let them go for a second. Their invisible patrols could be felt swarming around them; and their audacious Uhlans, like a swarm of wasps, were always buzzing about their ears.

He approached Longueville, and crossed the level-crossing of the new railway line from Verdun to Metz, the laying of which was being completed. In the meadows bordering the road to the right troops were making coffee. The Tixier division, belonging to the 6th corps, had put down their knapsacks. Near the dying fires squads of men were conversing. The saucepans were not yet unbuckled. Foot soldiers were sitting on the edge of the ditch, their legs dangling down, smoking unconcernedly. A beardless, pale-faced quartermaster-sergeant was snoring with open mouth, his head resting against his accoutrements. Du Breuil passed some officers grouped around a Colonel who was sitting on a folding stool consulting a map. Suddenly, over the heights of Montigny, a small white, opaque cloud was seen to rise in the air. There was a report, and almost immediately a black point, a shell, whistled in a straight line, increasing in size as it came. Brutus, frightened, sprang forward, and the shell burst in the midst of the group of officers. A moment of bewilderment followed, during which, in a red flash, the wind from the wings of Death struck his temples, and the horrible picture appeared before him of a head clean cut from the body, three bodies which were falling, and on the ground, in a pool of blood near the folding stool, still upright, the Colonel, as white as a sheet, his stomach and legs shattered. He turned round. The small Light Cavalry soldier was galloping behind him.

A second and a third shell burst, without wounding anybody. As he reached the first houses of Longueville violent reports sounded to the left. The Saint-Quentin fort was replying. He felt a sudden joy. Ah, ah! they were destroying them. The wasp was crushed! But it had had time to sting.

Before a long building, the courtyard of which was full of officers and men in green liveries, who overflowed into the street, where waggons and equipages were stationed, he had to slacken his pace. From the imperial arms on the carriages,

and the company of the Guard which was standing motionless under arms, he recognised the house to be that in which the Sovereign had passed the night. The alarm caused by the shells from Montigny was great, and orders had been given for a hasty departure. This fleeing Emperor, who had become from one day to the next a kind of encumbering baggage—a State personage who impeded himself as well as others—produced a strange, almost a painful, impression upon him.

He was impressed by the face of the little cavalry soldier ; it now expressed the naïve joy of the *badaud*. Then those eyes of an inhabitant of a faubourg twinkled, and a common street expression deformed the corner of his mouth. Du Breuil once more saw the dinner at Saint-Cloud, the august face upon which was an expression of suffering and dejection ; again he felt that impulse which had already drawn him towards Napoleon ; then, saddened, he thought, ‘The prestige of misfortune ! A fine piece of fudge.’

It took one hour to ride the two kilometres separating Longueville from the Ban Saint-Martin. As he was passing a regiment of men of the line, who were at rest, an insupportable stench made his heart rise in his throat. He stopped up his nose. Some soldiers who were passing on a waggon for leading oats cried jeeringly :

‘Heap of carrion !’

‘Imbeciles !’ exclaimed scornful, somewhat envious voices.

But there was no doubt about it. That smell ! The whole regiment aroused itself, and, from the saucepans rapidly unbuckled from their knapsacks, each man quickly threw far into the fields his four days’ supply of cooked meat, which had decomposed in the sun.

The Ban Saint-Martin, with its tall masses of verdure quite white with dust, its naked plain crowded with innumerable vehicles, maintained there by exhausted baggage-masters, appeared in sight. All of them were waiting to take their place, watching for a favourable opportunity to slip in. . . .

Troops were still leaving Metz—a whole division of them, which was slowly advancing : the Zouaves and the Grenadiers of the Guard. Under the coating of dust, white galloons mingled with the blue coats, which, like the scarlet trousers and the wide breeches of the Zouaves, had become white. Each face appeared to be covered with a mask, and the moustaches were as though sprinkled with flour.

A distant report—the explosion of a mine, the echo of which was repeated to infinity—then made each one start.

‘It is the Longueville bridge which has been blown up,’ said a peasant, at the head of his horses, near Du Breuil.

It was noon when he arrived near the Maison de Planches. He had been in the saddle for four hours, and had hardly covered four miles. The 3rd and the 4th corps had not yet raised their camps. The troops, harassed by the combat of the previous day, by the long night march, and by sleeplessness, lined the road. Exhausted men were sleeping in the ditch. Around the piles of arms were standing the over-fatigued sentinels, leaning upon their chassepots.

On all sides were soldiers breathing irregularly in their heavy sleep, their faces congested, legs here and there, bodies stretched out on the very spot where they had fallen overcome by fatigue. Some soldiers were repairing their clothes, resewing their shoes with string. Upon seeing the staff officer and the little cavalry soldier, a corporal, who was in the course of mending his red trousers with a piece of blue cloth, took his pipe from his mouth.

‘The headquarters of the 4th corps?’ asked Du Breuil.

The man shrugged his shoulders, his elbows sticking out, and a vacant look in his eyes. He did not know. Near the officers’ mess were erected some tents, and on all sides could be seen saucepans, blackened by smoke, licked by small tongues of flame, which rested upon little ovens hollowed out in the ground, or constructed of three stones, and in which the soldiers’ *soupe* was being cooked.

He wandered about for a long time, and after receiving direction after direction reached Sansonnet. General Ladmirault was leaving table. He listened to the reading of the order written down by Du Breuil in his note-book. His anxious look took in the meadows where his divisions were encamped, the roads crowded with vehicles, the green mass of the Saint-Quentin. Between the heights, the hollow in the hill of Lessy indented the clear sky—an indentation of azure through which passed dense white clouds swept by the west wind. One could hear an almost insensible rumbling—the distant murmur of the army on the march. The General turned towards the chief of his staff. They consulted together. Ladmirault was saying:

‘It’s easy to order the movement to be hurried on. As if they didn’t know that all these roads are obstructed!’ He raised his voice. ‘On the Châtel side, the road, which is not

broad, is blocked for a considerable distance by a bridge equipage. There's baggage belonging to all the corps; there's everything—artillery and reserves. In what way do they want me to pass? Why not use the Briey road?’

When his mission was accomplished, Du Breuil shook the Comte de Cussac, an Aide-de-camp, by the hand—that officer of whom he had asked poor Vacossart for news the day before. They were members of the same club; both had kept more than one bank at the Sporting Club, and finished more than one supper between Rose Noël and Nini Déglauze. Strange these recollections appeared to him. Had he really lived like that in the past? For the past fortnight they had been other men; they found themselves changed.

After eating a wing of a chicken and drinking a glass of bordeaux—the little cavalry soldier devoured the carcass, and emptied the bottom of the bottle—Du Breuil set off again. He again passed through the camp of the 3rd corps, which he found in a state of commotion, owing to the order to leave. Tents were being pulled down, and the baggage was being loaded; some piles of arms were already unlocked; the troops were forming into line.

At the gates of Metz, and at the Ban Saint-Martin, the invasion recommenced. Under the leaden sky, it was the same tumult, the same forward advance of the river of men and vehicles, perspiring, sorrowful, suffering, swearing, the horses falling down, the drivers whipping and beating their teams under the blinding dust and the fierce sun. Du Breuil passed fresh regiments, which halted every instant. And whenever they halted men fell down like leaden masses; the reservists especially could hold out no longer, and, without the strength to unbuckle their knapsacks, many of them, with red faces, immediately fell asleep. But two or three minutes later it was necessary to set off again, and non-commissioned officers shook these unfortunate sleepers, who, without a complaint, once more stood upright, and once more set off with the air of sleep-walkers.

Every now and then he recognised some of his comrades of the general staff, who were trying to put things a little in order. Restaud, whom he met near Longueville, informed him that the Marshal had ordered the disbanding of the auxiliary carriages.

‘But they carry the provisions?’ said Du Breuil.

‘We shall find provisions on the way.’

‘It would have been simpler to have utilized since yesterday the Lorry and Woippy roads, or to have left the provisions in Metz,’ he growled.

He could not understand the conduct of a chief who, in full retreat before a daring enemy, waited until useless impedimenta had produced such disorder, so disastrous a state of obstruction, to get rid of it.

‘What’s the good of discussing the matter?’ exclaimed Restaud. ‘I simply do what I’m told.’

Once discharged, however, the carriages could not be disbanded. They had then to be taken to the rear. Those which had not passed through Longueville were prepared to turn back along the road; the others, caught in the defile, were obliged to advance, since by turning round they would only have redoubled the slowness of the disorder. And while Restaud, assisted by the men of the commissariat and the baggage-masters, barred the way before the frenzied convoy drivers, the train-carriages, the artillery and the reserves detached themselves one by one from the confusion caused by the first vehicles, which stopped still, *pêle-mêle* with the infantry which marched past, platoon after platoon, white with dust from head to foot.

The convoys of the 2nd corps and of the chief headquarters, without taking into account innumerable baggage waggons, continued on their way, the slow ascent of the plateau, ceaselessly tramping under the sun.

Nobody of importance remained at Moulins; the staff had just left. It was four o’clock. The orderlies were about to leave with led-horses. Du Breuil noticed Frisch in the act of fastening Cydalise’s girth. Brutus, covered with froth, neighed. Du Breuil changed his mount and got astride the disappointed mare, who began to drag one of her hoofs, under the pretence that she was lame. He gave her the spur and broke into a gallop, while Frisch, near a bucketful of water which he had hastily fetched, sponged down the delighted Brutus, preventing him by little blows with the halter from drinking the dirty water towards which, his lip moving back over rosy gums, he stretched his neck.

How hot it was! Du Breuil would have given anything in the world to have slaked his thirst. At the point where the road branches into two, towards Châtel-Saint-Germain, he could stand it no longer, and drew near to a stone trough before a farm. It was empty. The little cavalry soldier understood,

and, with a voluntary movement, offered him his flask, which he had refilled at Moulins. 'If you would like a drink, sir.' He was touched by the simplicity of the offer, and drank a mouthful.

They struck off along a Roman road which reached the plateau more directly than by the ordinary way. Beneath them was stretched out the little valley of Rozérieulles, with its meadows, its red roofs, and the deep green of its walnut-trees. The more they mounted, the larger became the circle of the horizon. They now dominated the valley of the Moselle. Above the winding road, whence arose a confused hubbub, was a thick cloud of dust. The immense landscape, in a bath of sunlight, stretched out in the splendid azure. Blue rivers wound in and out across the draught-board of fields and clumps of trees; and in the still air appeared white Metz, with its innumerable houses, the square silhouette of the tall mass of the cathedral profiled upon the azure. The Lorraine town was smiling, happy, in her corset with its lace of stone. A slight golden haze enveloped her in glory.

For a moment they remained motionless, the little unmindful cavalry soldier finding the scene *chouette*. Du Breuil was moved to the bottom of his soul.

'Adieu, Metz!' he said, after a few seconds.

Pushing forward upon their horses, they moved ahead. The circle of the horizon got small and smaller, until they had nothing around them but the plateau, and behind them the sky.

'What is your name, and where do you come from?' asked Du Breuil.

'Jubault, of Tours, sir.'

'You don't mind leaving Metz?'

'It's not too soon, sir,' smiled the man, encouraged.

Du Breuil murmured 'Yes'; but at the bottom of his heart he was unable to say whether he was happy or sad.

The plateau was covered with troops. On the Génivaux declivity the terrible crowding recommenced. The road, embanked in a small ravine, was nothing more than a deep cutting, broken up by the wheels and the incessant scraping of boots. One sank into a yard of dust, which floated in the air like a fog. Men and horses were white with it, and unrecognisable.

Suddenly, when near Gravelotte, as he turned round, he saw on the slope which they had just left a man, conveniently stationed five hundred yards away alongside a wood, with a

field-glass to his eyes. The Uhlan jumped from his horse, calmly opened a map or a pocket-book, and made some notes.

‘He doesn’t put himself out,’ exclaimed the cavalry soldier.

Du Breuil made an angry movement and felt for his revolver. No, he would not fire; it would only be a bullet wasted. The Uhlan had steadily folded up his map, regirthed his horse, and jumped into the saddle. He disappeared.

‘Good-evening,’ exclaimed Jubault. ‘They are everywhere. They know a thing. They disguise themselves as pedlars, and follow us on horseback in white blouses and sabots. . . .’

They reached the first houses of Gravelotte. The whole general staff was drawn up on the highway before the Emperor’s residence. A little behind, some horsemen of the escort were walking the horses, which were ready to start, up and down by the bridle. Du Breuil dismounted, and reported to General Jarras. The imperial suite, Generals and Chamberlains, impatient for news, mingled with the groups. Everyone was talking about events. Bazaine was holding a consultation with the Emperor, and people were waiting for the end of the interview. The Prince Imperial, with anxious face, went from one group to the other. Upon his approach voices were lowered and conversations changed. He questioned those officers whom he knew by sight, and attempted to seize the exact meaning of the words of their respectful and evasive answers. The young man’s preoccupations were stamped upon his face; he seemed to understand the seriousness of events.

Du Breuil encountered Décherac’s everlasting smile, which was sad upon this occasion, and seemed to clearly say, ‘Poor child!’ The two officers nodded.

‘Do you know,’ said Décherac, ‘that to-day is August 15th? A queer kind of fête-day!’

The striking contrast moved Du Breuil. August 15th, with the bells of Notre Dame ringing, the addresses and the delegations of the State bodies, the streets decorated with flags, the illuminations at night. . . . In the bitter irony of his soul the glorious series of past fêtes on August 15th was passed in review. All that was very far off.

‘Yes, a queer kind of fête-day,’ he repeated.

‘Bazaine presented his good wishes to the Emperor upon his arrival, offering him a bouquet of wretched flowers plucked from the garden of the house where he is camping.’

Ah, that sickly bouquet presented to the Emperor by the commander of his army! Du Breuil found this solitary homage

of troops still faithful truly symbolical. Past acclamations commenced to sound in his ears like a knell, and to reveal to him a fête-day ; this day of distress and abandonment, in the dismal silence and in the midst of whisperings, appeared to him still more sorrowful. Disquietude, egoism, forgetfulness, were stamped upon every face.

The interview was prolonged. In turning his eyes towards the closed windows of the small house, he recognised the tall, dry figure of General Jaillant. He was not speaking a word, his thin lips, under his imperious eagle-like nose, remaining pressed together. Near him was a perturbed Chamberlain, searching the woods and the outlet of Ars with a field-glass. Du Breuil heard him murmur :

‘Those woods, General, are not safe.’

His voice slightly trembled. Jaillant shrugged his shoulders.

‘What’s there to fear?’

The Chamberlain faced the General. This disconcerted face ! Du Breuil hesitated to recognise it as that of Comte Duclos. The drawn-out moustache retained a remnant of arrogance, but these eyes, in which there was no fear, this tremulous voice, formerly so provocative ! . . .

‘He has not yet got over the fright,’ interjected Décherac. ‘The Emperor narrowly escaped being captured this afternoon by Uhlans. They were twelve hundred metres away, in view of the road, and they allowed the cortège to pass. . . . Curious, isn’t it?’

Floppe, who had come up, exclaimed :

‘Such is the anxiety that the Emperor wishes to set off immediately, in order to reach Verdun. But there is no escort. The Cavalry of the Guard is only arriving, and worn out ; so that they won’t start until early to-morrow morning.’

Attention was attracted by words uttered in a loud voice. A General, whose coat was unbuttoned, bringing to view his red belt, was speaking animatedly. He was on horseback, white with dust, having, like the others, tramped the whole length of the route. Du Breuil recognised stout General Chenot, the commander of a division of the 6th corps. He had not seen him since the soirée at Saint-Cloud, when, his red neck pressing against his gold-embroidered collar, he walked away under the lustres with Jaillant, talking to him, arm in arm. He was complaining violently to Jarras, one of his old comrades. Seeing Du Breuil, he motioned to him a ‘Good-day,’ and continued his complaints without lowering his tone

of voice. He was now calling attention to the Generals of the suite, pointing out Jaillant in the distance, and sneering bitterly. 'No need to be so proud . . . a pretty scrape . . . counsellors are not the ones who have to pay. . . .' And Du Breuil once more saw him under the lustres, holding Jaillant by the arm, as sincere as he was to-day.

There was a commotion, and then deep silence. The Emperor, behind Bazaine, appeared on the threshold of the little door. His complexion was gray; his eyes, under which were pouches, had a dead expression. He wore a General's undress uniform under a civilian overcoat. His step was heavy and depressed. Bazaine took his leave. The Prince Imperial approached his father. The familiars of the Court bustled about. The staff, in the midst of a rush hither and thither, had already mounted on horseback, and reached their temporary quarters. . . . Du Breuil was still thinking of the scene, when Décherac, at table, gave an account of the bad effect which had been produced upon the soldiers by the sight of the Sovereign upon this anniversary-day. He had been present from noon at the slow defile of the army. Seated upon a kitchen chair, he had remained hour after hour facing the roadway before the interminable throng of soldiers. And without a cry, without a cheer, the divisions had passed in silence before this man with lustreless eyes, sallow complexion, and swollen abdomen, who was the Emperor Napoleon III. Nobody, not even Floppe, could think, without sadness, of this reverie of the unfortunate man, looking at what remained of his power pass before him.

A diversion was made by the day's news. A little occurrence was just claiming the attention of the chief headquarters. The Marshal had left the house which he occupied for another, situated one and a third miles ahead. In the meantime General Jarras went to find him, and to receive his instructions. In reply to his offer to bring the staff nearer, the Marshal said :

'The staff is all right where it is. Let it remain.'

People were amused at the annoyance caused the chief because of Jarras's mania for red-tapism, momentarily joking over it without suspecting what serious results these slight collisions had, and how damaging they were to discipline and the well-being of the service.

At night the news came that the Forton division had had a serious engagement near Mars-la-Tour. It had had to retreat on Vionville. Consequently, the 2nd corps, its front insuffi-

ciently protected, was remaining beyond Rezonville, the 6th corps on its right. The last regiments of the Guard were arriving. They took up a position, in addition to the artillery reserves and the park, beyond Gravelotte.

On the Doncourt road, the Du Barail division alone reached Jarny. It was known through estafettes that the 3rd corps was on the march. As to the 4th corps, it was still stationed near the Moselle, being unable to advance along the obstructed roads. At the same time, various pieces of information, furnished by reconnoitring-parties and spies, made known that German troops, which were estimated to number twenty-five thousand men, were marching over the Ars and Novéant bridges in the direction of Mars-la-Tour. They swarmed the woods of Gorze. If one did not want to see the road blocked before one, it was time to make haste. Orders to be on the watch were sent to all the corps; the army was to be ready to set off at the earliest hour. And while those of his comrades, who had not yet fulfilled a mission, in turn mounted on horseback, cursing as they did so, Du Breuil with delight stretched himself out on his narrow camp-bed, and fell into a feverish sleep.

Before dawn the crow of a cock rang through the air. The dull tramping of horses, which were being drawn up under the windows, awakened him. Jumping to his feet, he looked in amazement at the unknown room, the beams of the ceiling, and the sideboard, upon which coloured plates were ranged. Suddenly he saw a portrait of the Emperor on the wall. He recollected. He was at Gravelotte. The Emperor set off this morning, fleeing from the army.

It was cruel, the comparison with another departure which forced itself upon him. He again saw before him the platform of the little station in the Saint-Cloud park, the train drawn up on the line, the green carriages with their N's surmounted by a crown. Ah! the illusions of that time, the touching farewell, the enthusiasm, the hope! Again he saw the gilded courtesans, the commotion of the Aides-de-camp, the Ministers, the Court familiars; then the whistle blew, and the train moved away in a flood of sunlight, carrying with it the destiny, the fortune of France.

From the threshold he took in the gray road, the alignment of Lancers of the Guard, and the Empress's Dragoons, motionless in their white cloaks. Faces were livid in the pale dawn. At times a horse snorted and pawed the ground. The majority of them slept, standing stiffly upon their legs. The Court

carriages were waiting before the Emperor's house. He took a few steps, and started. A voice called to him, 'Pierre!'

It came from the ranks. He looked hesitatingly.

'Don't you recognise me?' said the voice.

His heart beat with delight. Lacoste! Did he recognise him! . . . He was in battle position, at the side of the old quartermaster—the Saint-Cloud veteran, egad!

Lacoste straightened his lean chest. He seemed taller and drier than ordinarily. His nostrils were drawn in and his eyes were sunken. Dark was the pure water and the blue, so limpid, of his eyes. Concentrated rage hardened his features. His cheek-bones were red with the fire of fever.

'Beastly night!' he said. 'On foot since two o'clock . . . trimming ourselves up . . . not worth the while . . . to decamp. . . .'

Du Breuil patted Conquérant.

'Disgusts her also. It's too stupid. To think I've never seen the colour of a Prussian! For fifteen days marching, rain and mud . . . Borny at last. 'We're going to fight. . . . It's all nonsense! And this morning, when things look more promising, we leave for Châlons. This is the work of a gendarme, of a hospital attendant, of an imbecile; it certainly isn't that of a soldier.'

He became heated in his anger, and unclasped his heavy cloak. Underneath appeared his sky-blue jacket.

'What! you are wearing your jacket!' exclaimed Du Breuil. 'What have you done with your white uniform?'

Lacoste growled:

'It is growing mouldy in Paris. We should have resembled the Germans had we worn them. . . . Then we operate in undress. . . . It's quite good enough for what we have to do.'

Du Breuil detected a faint smile of approbation on the hard face of the quartermaster. Silent, upright in his saddle, he never moved an inch. Lacoste continued:

'Musette halts. Titan is with the baggage. I shall doubtless never see them again.'

A distant command rang out: 'Shoulder . . . lances!' The lances were raised in the cold air; the little flags fluttered for a moment and then hung down again like rags.

Lacoste drew his sword with an angry gesture.

'Farewell, Pierre,' he said.

The eyes of the lancers were fixed upon the little house. Du Breuil drew near to it.

The Emperor and the Prince Imperial got into the calèche, which had been harnessed at the posting-house, together with two members of the suite. The Sovereign's face was discomposed by extreme fatigue. Tears seemed to have traced lines down it. His breast was still more expressive of depression. Nobody had collected around the vehicles in which the sorrowful military household were taking their seats. A few Cent-gardes caracoled. Their striking uniform, consisting of red trousers, blue coat with gold shoulder-knots, embroidered bicorn hat, looked dull in the cold, early morn. Four or five peasants were gaping in the deserted street. Du Breuil caught sight of Jaillant's cadaverous face, and the drooping moustache of Comte Duclos. There was a general air of sadness.

Suddenly the galloping of an estafette rang out. It was rumoured that the Uhlans infested the road. Bazaine at last arrived, and almost immediately after him Canrobert, then Bourbaki and Frossard. Without getting down from his horse the Commander-in-Chief shook Napoleon's hand. The trumpets gave the signal to set off at a trot; the Empress's Dragoons proceeded ahead, and the driver silently touched his horses with the whip. The carriage moved forward, followed immediately by the lancers, four abreast and in column. In the midst of the noise of the escort, growing fainter and fainter, through the pale dawn and towards the unknown Du Breuil followed with his soul this sinister calèche in which were the old man and the child, their backs bowed under the weight of fate.

Where were they thus departing? The impulse which yesterday again drew him towards Napoleon once more took possession of him; as he had acclaimed him in his glory, so he pitied him in his hour of misfortune. Never would he forget the sweet, peaceful smile, the expression of happiness on the august face. But he could not think of this guilty thoughtfulness without sorrow, or of this astounding reverse without trouble. Bereft of his former faith, feeling his way in the midst of darkness and doubt, he could only think.

One by one fresh pieces of information came in. The enemy was not in force, and there was no need for immediate fear. General Frossard, with the 2nd corps, had come to the definite opinion that the German forces which had been reported at Gorze did not exceed four thousand men. No news of the enemy had been received by the 6th corps. And Captain Arnous-Rivière, whose company of volunteer scouts had during the night

searched the ravines in the neighbourhood of the Moselle, on his part made the same report.

On the other hand, the Marshal received a letter from Marshal Lebœuf, informing him that one of his divisions had not yet rejoined. He also learnt that the 4th corps, far from having reached Doncourt on the previous day, had hardly commenced its movement. . . . In the meantime the 2nd corps, the 6th corps, and the Guard, were still waiting for the signal to set off. Tents were folded, the horses were bridled and the men were under arms since four o'clock in the morning.

'An order to be copied, gentlemen.'

Laune dictated in a quick voice :

'The tents can again be erected . . . the men must only go to the water in bodies. . . . We shall probably leave in the afternoon, when the 3rd and the 4th corps have arrived near us, in short . . .'

The officers charged to carry the order rode away at a quick trot in search of the commanders of the corps. Du Breuil, who was now free, watched Décherac, who had been sent to Verneville, disappear on his chestnut horse on the Doncourt road. He felt sad ; he could not console himself for the time which had been lost. . . . First of all Borny, which delayed the retreat for one day ; then this senseless crowding on the roads, which had frittered away two more days. . . . And these contradictory reports. Which were to be believed ? An obscure hope, fathered by a wish, made him preferably accept the last report. The German army, on the face of it, could not have thus overtaken them ; it must still be at a distance. They only had reconnoitring-parties before them.

The weather, which up to that time had been foggy, cleared, and a bright sun made the village golden. He took advantage of his leisure to write a letter to his father. He had just taken it to the post-waggon, when suddenly the cannon boomed. . . . Horses were hastily saddled . . . there was a furious gallop to Bazaine's house. The entire staff, grouped around the Marshal, saw a body of vehicles descending the Rezonville road at a giddy pace, frantically rolling along in panic. The frenzied drivers were whipping their horses with all their strength. They passed through a cloud of dust, uttering inarticulate cries. Then bare-headed dragoons, mad with fear, riding their horses bareback, appeared in sight.

The Forton division had just been surprised at the watering-place, and a great battle was being fought.

CHAPTER II.

BEHIND the Marshal, whose white *couvre-nuque** floated in the wind, the staff dashed at full speed in the direction of the fight. Shells were commencing to rain down near Rezonville. There was no doubt about it—superior forces were crushing us. A sheet of iron and lead was falling upon the 2nd corps. . . .

‘Francastel! Floppe! Décherac!’ Laune’s voice transmitted the Marshal’s orders, and emphasized them with brief indications. Du Breuil heard: ‘To Marshal Lebœuf . . . enter into line . . . let him hurry up.’ And Ladmirault? he asked himself. Doubtless, they hoped that, by reason of his old experience, he would march in the direction of the cannon. He again saw the General’s look taking in his motionless divisions, and then anxiously turning towards the Lessy hill. Ah, this lost time! If only this time it would not again be like it was at Forbach! If only they did not allow themselves to be stupidly crushed! If only assistance arrived!

The Marshal and his staff, followed by the squadron escort, ascended towards Vionville. On the left could be seen the hamlet of Flavigny, which was strongly occupied by the Bataille division. When on his way, Du Breuil noticed that the mitrailleuses were no help at all; they were evidently only of use at short range. The firing of our cannon was also inefficient, as it did not appreciably lessen the enemy’s columns. On the other hand, the German artillery, owing to the skill with which it was grouped, and the undeniable superiority of its range, was doing us enormous damage. A few battalions, decimated by a terrible fire, were already giving way.

The ensemble of the ground could be seen from a hillock to the left of the road. The Prussian attack upon Flavigny by the woods, and upon Vionville by the plain, was clearly visible. From the other side of the village could be heard the shrill rattle of their little drums beating the charge. Volleys of musketry crepitated. A few houses were in flames. Walls fell under the explosion of shells. And at times, through the smoke, while the assaulting column, routed, whirled round,

* A piece of cloth attached to the back of a helmet or hat, to protect the neck from the sun.—F. L

Du Breuil heard the joyful notes of the clarion of the Chasseurs sounding forth the refrain of the battalion :

' Ah ! Quel est donc, quel est donc
Celui qu'on aime,
C'est le dou . . . c'est le douzième.'

High-spirited troops, all the same. Come! nothing was lost. . . . The escort now reached Rezonville. The 2nd corps, which had got over its surprise, was holding its ground. Besides, was not the 6th corps and the Guard quite near? They would, without doubt, soon enter the fight. With fierce joy, Du Breuil saw the Prussians crushed—swept into the Moselle. They would have to pay dear for their audacity.

Just then there came a brief ' Du Breuil !' And an order having been hastily given, Brutus was spurred into a gallop across the fields.

' The batteries of the Guard. To the south of Gravelotte,' said Laune.

And leaping over furrows, sharply turning to right and left to avoid the heaped-up sheaves—the harvest, which had been cut two days before, had not yet been gathered in—the fine animal scampered away. Here were companies lying on the ground to allow the storm of bullets to pass, the officers flat upon their stomachs joking, encouraging the men with a merry word; there, deserted fields strewn with arms, knapsacks, shakos; a few wounded soldiers, some dead ones marking out the passage of a troop. At a bound, Brutus grazed a very young Second Lieutenant, who was stretched upon his back. His twitching right hand convulsively clenched the hilt of his sword. One of his legs was missing. Where was it? The poor fellow was still alive. That look! . . . Ah, the batteries! . . . There they were spread out, facing a wood.

' Major !' cried Du Breuil, upon arriving near a group of officers. They were conversing together. Nobody moved. ' Major !' he repeated violently.

An officer turned round with an irritated air. D'Avol ! Recognising Du Breuil, his face softened in expression.

' Ah ! is that you, Pierre ? How dryly you speak to-day ! What has your department got ?'

Du Breuil transmitted the order. For a quarter of a second, he intuitively felt that he had offended his friend by the abruptness with which he had called out. They now galloped side by side in silence. It was a slight misunderstanding which

separated them, but they had no time to explain matters. Behind them the drivers were whipping their large dark-bay horses, which swept over furrows and ditches with many a bound from cannon, avant-trains, and caisson. The direction they were to follow was marked out by the officers' swords held on high. In the midst of an astounding, furious rush and whirl, the horses and guns swooped upon a ridge. The cannon were brought into action, and fire was opened.

Du Breuil thought of D'Avol's susceptibility when he had returned to his post. In the meantime the Prussians were capturing Vionville and threatening Flavigny. The two villages commenced to break into flames. Shortly the Vionville church tower oscillated, and its black spire was seen to fall into the flames.

'The devil!' exclaimed Lieutenant-Colonel Poterin to Du Breuil. 'That unfortunate 2nd corps hasn't any luck.' He added: 'I've just broken a finger-nail.'

He calmly took a small penknife from his pocket. Du Breuil smiled. What a devil of a man he was, with his mania for always trimming something! The first time he had seen Poterin, sharpening a pencil, came to his mind. How badly at times one judged men! Such minutiae under fire assumed a singular character. This awkward fellow, with his bourgeois courage, so simple a man, acquired a kind of grandeur. . . . A regiment was disbanding.

'The Marshal ought to advance the Guard,' muttered Du Breuil.

The calm, heavy face of the Commander-in-Chief, with his white *couvre-nuque*, could be seen in the midst of a group formed by his staff. A shell burst a few yards from him. He looked in the direction of the explosion, and then calmly turned his head. Poterin finished trimming his finger-nail.

'The Guard is useful to the left,' he said. 'It connects us with Metz.'

He carefully closed the blade of his penknife, which he replaced in his pocket. The galloping of Aides-de-camp suddenly increased. The Prussian infantry was proceeding beyond Flavigny, and the 2nd corps was about to give way. General Frossard galloped up in person. Du Breuil saw him exchange a few words with the Marshal, then turn round, and give an order to Laisné, who set off at full speed.

Five minutes afterwards—two seconds it seemed—a regiment of Lancers dashed up with slackened reins. The lines of blue

which orderlies were crowding, he saw Frisch leaning over a large dog, which was crouched before the window and ceaselessly howling. Its paws stretched out stiffly before it, its head on one side, the Ulm dog saw Du Breuil approach, and without moving again uttered its sinister howl.

'He has been howling at Death the whole night,' said Frisch. 'He is calling for his master.'

Poor Titan! . . . In the light of a fire at night Du Breuil had recognised him as he passed the baggage of the Guard upon reaching Gravelotte. Immediately claimed by Frisch, the dog had allowed itself to be led away.

'He has touched nothing,' said the honest fellow, pointing out a porringer of *soupe*, 'and since two o'clock in the morning he has wept after his own fashion, even when one of the wounded became furious, and wanted to put a bullet in him.'

Du Breuil's eyes filled with tears at the cruel recollection. 'Odious, stupid end!' And then his thought passed from Lacoste—what had become of the body of his friend?—to the most recent occurrences. About ten o'clock at night, having found the Commander-in-Chief near the post-house, he had silently returned to Gravelotte in his proper position with the staff. The road was covered with infantry, soldiers who had left their regiments to find shelter in the village. Upon seeing them the Marshal had let fall some bitter reflections. However, hope and joy were stamped on their faces. Orders were impatiently awaited. . . . Everyone was rejoicing at the victory, and thought of completing it on the following day.

'At dawn,' Restaud was saying, 'the movement will be resumed, in order to complete the enemy's rout. . . .'

Bazaine, upon entering the inn whence the Emperor had set off in the morning, had summoned to him the Chief Commissary of Stores, and ordered him to immediately proceed to Metz with part of his staff to obtain there a convoy of provisions. He was to bring it at the break of day.

'Little good it was disbanding on the previous day!' murmured Floppe.

Finally, about eleven o'clock, Jarras, who had once been shown to the door, was summoned before the Marshal.

Du Breuil had a fit of rage at the thought of the orders which he was then obliged to copy. . . . He again saw the stupor which was upon every face, and the sorrow which shone forth from indignant eyes.

‘. . . Lack of provisions and ammunition compels us to fall back upon Metz.’

His short sleep, his feverish repose during the night, had only exasperated the feeling of revolt which had taken possession of him at the minute when, bent over the table, he wrote, and trembled as he did so, the shameful lines. . . . By force of discipline and will-power he mastered himself, but his heart and his reason protested. So much heroism useless, so much blood lost! And tired—exceedingly tired—he again passed over in his mind the reflections which Restaud, Décherac, and himself had exchanged once they were outside, whilst through the icy night, under the cold twinkle of the pure stars, comrades went to carry the incomprehensible news to the sleeping and confident army.

‘The finishing of the ammunition,’ said Décherac, ‘was not serious. The general and corps reserves were there. . . . At daybreak they could draw upon them, on the very spot, two and a half miles behind, or on the Plappeville plateau.’

‘But it was the great Manitou of the artillery, Soleille himself,’ objected Restaud, ‘who warned the Marshal.’

‘He’s dreaming,’ murmured Décherac. ‘The fall he had from his horse this afternoon has ended by turning his head. Besides, since provisions were recently obtained from Metz, why didn’t they send for shells and cartridges, if they were in need of them?’

‘That is what has been done,’ said Restaud.

Décherac continued:

‘That’s not the question at issue. In reality, we have ammunition for three battles. It is sufficient to fight one of them—one only. And, victorious, to-morrow we reach Verdun, where we can take in a fresh stock of provisions. But there! Bazaine has never wanted to reach Verdun. . . .’

Was this possible? Du Breuil remembered the Marshal’s hesitations since he took the command. He had only reluctantly decided upon retreat, forced as he was to do so by the Emperor. And since that time he had only taken half-measures, allowing events to regulate his conduct . . . the slowness of the retreat, the indecision after Borny, the suspension of the morning movement, the surprise two hours afterwards, and, during the whole of the fight, that constant pre-occupation for his left. . . .

‘Was not his first step, after getting rid of the Emperor,’ Décherac had added, ‘to interrupt the march? He was his

master,' sighed Décherac. 'Metz is a solid base for operations. Under shelter of an intrenched camp, and with an army like ours, what cannot a skilful General do? . . . Ah, gentlemen, perhaps this resolution which dismays us is that of a politician. . . . There we are under Metz for ever!'

Was Décherac speaking seriously? With that sceptical smile of his, one never knew.

'Let us suppose that the Mars-la-Tour road is blocked,' Restaud had observed. 'The Conflans road and that of Briey will remain open. . . . We can still make a way.'

'In the meantime the German army,' replied Décherac, 'is narrowing the circle by forced marches, and we are going to instal ourselves with His Excellency under the walls of the Place.'

'Is it our rôle to discuss?' asked Restaud. 'Can we know the thought which dictated the order which we are obeying? Without doubt the Marshal has good reasons for falling back under the protection of the forts. Who knows that he wouldn't prefer to harass and conquer the enemy?'

'No, no!' Du Breuil had then cried. 'Since we have fought two battles to reach Verdun, since so many brave men are dead, at least the sacrifice should not be offered in vain. Victory is ours, the discount which has been paid being in blood. To fall back under these conditions is the act of a fool, because it is giving up gained ground; or it is the act of a coward, who throws down his rifle under the pretext of going to fetch cartridges. . . . It is no longer a question of recoiling, of hesitations, and of a new plan of campaign. . . . It is a question of doing his duty like a man, and of pushing forward to the bitter end! Since morning I have seen not a few of the soldiers. . . . They fought bravely, and only ask to recommence. I'll swear there is not a soldier or an officer who to-morrow, when the order is read, will not utter a cry of sorrow and astonishment. . . . Ammunition! Provisions! We lack them in the middle of France, eleven kilometres from our revictualling centre? Well? And the Germans—how is it that they are twenty leagues from their centre?'

These arguments crowded to Du Breuil's mind, only they were still clearer and more striking. However, he preferred Restaud's resignation to Décherac's somewhat disconnected irony, feeling that there was hope in the simplicity of such a renunciation.

The daylight increased. Du Breuil was present at the

preparations for the departure with death in his soul. The waggons were yoked. Frisch, with Titan in leash, and dragging the Mecklenburg horse after him, passed, saying to the latter: 'Geeho, William!' Followed by its interminable special convoy, the chief headquarters set off, with the exception of five officers, who were sent by General Jarras to the commanders of the corps to inform them of the direction they were to follow. Du Breuil was ordered to proceed to General Frossard. The whole army commenced its retreat, and again, in the midst of an indescribable confusion of regimental baggage waggons, ammunition caissons, transport waggons for the wounded, administration vehicles, artillery, and troops, the immense river flowed back by the only road which was free, its troubled and tumultuous current formed of a series of little compressed waves rolling in the opposite direction to that which it had formerly taken.

Du Breuil and Laisné proceeded side by side.

'Fortunately, they allow us to retreat in peace!' growled Frossard's Aide-de-camp, as they entered the defile of the Mance. 'A few sharpshooters in the woods, a division of cavalry and cannon, and we should be destroyed, swept away. . . .'

'It is evident they are not in a position to follow us,' raged Du Breuil. His bitterness was doubled by this remark. 'Or else they can hardly believe their eyes,' he continued, 'supposing our action is a feint. . . Well, my dear fellow, to confess ourselves beaten when we are the conquerors!'

'Who is the rear-guard?' asked Laisné, sadly shaking his head.

'The Metman division, which was not able to rejoin the main body yesterday. . . .'

'It can't be enjoying itself? Hallo!' he exclaimed, turning round. 'What is that smoke?'

Some soldiers were crying out with wild gestures. Du Breuil saw black wreaths of smoke on the left behind him.

'I'll go and see,' he said.

Cydalise, who had rested, galloped forward with little bounds. Some flights of crows flew near the ground with joyous caws. In a few minutes he reached Gravelotte. At the entrance to the village some train soldiers were throwing biscuit-boxes and provisions, camp effects, linen, and boots *pêle-mêle* into an immense bonfire.'

'Who ordered all that to be burnt?' he inquired, stupefied,

from a stout official of the commissariat, who, dismayed, was mopping his forehead.

‘The Commander-in-Chief, sir. Vehicles were needed for the transport of the wounded, so yesterday we unloaded a large number of them.’

An artilleryman, who was in the act of piling sacks of coffee on a caisson, chuckled : ‘That was a queer idea ! . . . Instead of using the empty vehicles. . . .’ Some soldiers of the line took possession of some blankets and trousers as they passed. . . . A platoon of light infantry pounced upon a pile of boots, and set off with new *godillots* suspended from their rifles. Large flames leapt up in the midst of dense smoke. Suddenly a bouquet of rockets exploded. Sacks of salt, thrown into the fire by hundreds, crackled and melted. Brown sheets of melted sugar blackened the earth, side by side with dried vegetables, which exploded before being carbonized. An acrid smell of caramel, shrivelled and twisted leather, and singed cloth, went to one’s throat. Preserved meats sent forth an odour of roasted flesh.

‘It appears that provisions are lacking!’ said a roguish hussar, winking at the artilleryman, who was getting ready to set off with his loaded carriage.

‘Yes, appears.’ He cracked his whip. ‘But wounded men are never lacking, old fellow. Remember that!’

Long-drawn-out complaints, appeals, and cries came from the village houses, where a large number of unfortunate wounded men were lying, abandoned ; and these cries mingled into a single groan, very soft and very low. . . . Du Breuil then remembered another similar moan which he had heard on that evening at Borny. Thinking of the dead, of all those dead men who were asleep, confident, with a dream of victory in their dilated pupils, he spurred on his horse, in an impulse of rage and horror, far from the fatal plateau.

It was a mournful road, by the side of the silent Laisné. As soon as the defile was passed, the 2nd corps took their positions again on the ridge which stretched as far as Rozérieulles.

‘A magnificent position,’ said Laisné. ‘Go in peace ! We shall fortify that.’

Du Breuil moved away along this same Roman road over which he had passed with Jubault two days previously. Slowly, in the splendid azure, the circle of the horizon got bigger and bigger. The vast landscape stretched out bathed in sunlight ;

the blue rivers wound in and out among the fields. White Metz appeared with its flock of houses and the tall mass of the cathedral. . . . The Lorraine town, happy, still smiled, enveloped in her golden haze.

Du Breuil rejoined the headquarters at Plappeville. He found there the comfortably installed staff at the doors of a pretty house reserved for the Marshal, and the roof of which could be seen between the trees. One by one his comrades returned and reported themselves. The 3rd corps, which was to the right of the 2nd, was firmly establishing itself on the plateau before Châtel-Saint-Germain, the Moscou, Leipsig, and La Folie farms serving as a basis. They were commencing to move the earth and provide the walls with loopholes. The guard was bivouacking at Lessy, quite near, between the Plappeville and Saint-Quentin forts. Its cavalry division and the divisions of General de Forton and General de Valabrègue were crowded in the Châtel ravine at Longeau. 'Like that, if our centaurs cannot charge,' Floppe remarked, 'they are at least protected from all surprise.' There was no news of the 4th corps. Décherac arrived with news of the 6th. Marshal Canrobert was at Vernéville; but he found he was in a compromised position there, being surrounded by woods. He asked that his position be rectified. Deprived of several regiments since the opening of the campaign because of going backwards and forwards between Châlons and Metz, the 6th corps was, in fact, the weakest of all, possessing neither cavalry, nor mitrailleuses, nor artillery reserves, nor engineers.

One hour afterwards Massoli, whose hair was turning from black to gray because of a need of dye of recent days, hoisted himself on horseback, moaning all the time, to take to Marshal Canrobert the authorization to establish himself at Saint-Privat, with the order to connect himself with the right of General Ladmirault, who was occupying Amanvillers, himself prolonging the line of the 3rd corps.

At that moment one of the officers who were on the look-out from the tower of the cathedral came with the warning that strong columns of the enemy had been passing for several hours over the various bridges of the Moselle, and were moving towards Rezonville by way of Ars and Novéant. Similar information had already been received from Saint-Quentin. Numbers of peasants also came running up, announcing that innumerable troops were on the march. . . . Du Breuil was astonished that the commanders of the corps were not warned,

that no step was taken in view of the attack which was only too certain. . . .

‘Why doesn’t the Marshal visit the troops in their positions?’ he exclaimed.

‘The last few days have been hard ones. Doubtless he is asleep,’ said Décherac, with a smile.

‘Yes, sleeping soundly,’ murmured Du Breuil bitterly.

Suddenly he cried:

‘Frisch! saddle William.’

He was sent to the headquarters of the artillery to inquire if the revictualling of the corps was progressing. He was struck when on the way by the animation of a crowd of officers. A hubbub of voices and laughter arose from the group. They were about to sell the effects of dead officers. A commissariat assistant, with an indifferent air, was carrying out the duties of auctioneer, standing in the midst of objects of all kinds spread out on the grass. The auction commenced: ‘A flannel shirt; six pairs of stockings; a small silver tinder-box; the complete poems of Alfred de Musset; a waterproof.’ The bids were at first uttered in a sad voice, which little by little gave place to a jesting tone, interjected by witticisms and pleasantries. ‘Two scent-bottles from Guerlain’s,’ said the expressionless voice. Du Breuil thought of Langlade, the little perfumed Second Lieutenant. ‘A pound of Marquis chocolate. . . .’ ‘Marquis, now’s your chance!’ they cried in a group of Light Infantry of the Guard. Bids were made. ‘A field-glass—a good field-glass . . . five, ten, fifteen, seventeen francs. . . . Stendahl’s “La Chartreuse de Parme” . . . twenty-five centimes. . . . A dozen pairs of gloves; two pairs of cloth drawers. . . .’

The monotonous voice continued to tell its sinister chaplet. Was it disrespect? No, only thoughtlessness, a natural necessity for reaction in the case of most of the buyers, characteristic French bravery and levity. . . . Du Breuil was already far off now, his eyes filled with tears.

News of Ladmirault was received about four o’clock. The 4th corps had as yet been unable to completely establish itself in its positions. Massoli finally turned up at nightfall, red, covered with perspiration, and dog-tired. The 6th corps had hardly reached Saint-Privat, and because of the late hour could not think of fortifying itself by temporary works. Marshal Canrobert also declared that he had not been able to again supply himself with artillery ammunition, namely, cartridges and cannon cartridges.

Peasants still continued to flow in, unanimously confirming the news of the increasing gathering of the enemy.

'The fight will be to-morrow,' said Restaud in the evening, as they were taking a moment's fresh air in groups, walking backwards and forwards.

'What is the Marshal thinking about,' asked Francastel, 'placing the 6th corps at the left wing? The flanks of a line ought to be specially protected by natural or artificial obstacles, and, when those are lacking, by strong masses of artillery; but the 6th corps is deprived of everything.'

Incapable of reasoning on his own account, he repeated in a decided tone of voice these phrases, which he had overheard by chance before dinner from the lips of Laune and Charlys.

Floppe hinted bitterly:

'Mind your own business, Francastel. The Marshal has made his plans. He is a shrewd man. Lebœuf is in the treacle, Frossard is depressed, and there is only Canrobert who can give him umbrage. Then——'

But Francastel was indignant, and waved his long arms.

'What is certain,' said Massoli, 'is that the 6th corps holds the Briey road, the only one which remains for us if we wish to reach Verdun. . . .'

'Reach Verdun!' cried Floppe. 'You're behind time, old chap.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Massoli; 'I have just learnt that the Marshal's Aide-de-camp, Major Magnan, has to leave to-night to inform the Emperor of yesterday's success, and to confirm the march towards the north-west. De Préval, the commissary, accompanies him, charged with the mission to get as many provisions as possible to Montmédy.'

'Naïve man!' jeered Floppe. 'Magnan is simply going to ask the Emperor to replace Frossard and Jarras; and the proof that we shall remain at Metz is that His Excellency has informed all the chiefs of the staffs of the army corps that they will have to be before the Châtel church at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. Colonel Charlys will be there. Gentlemen, salute.' The officers smiled. Charlys was daily gaining the favour which General Jarras lost with the Marshal. 'Colonel Charlys will take the chiefs of the staffs to reconnoitre the positions which we shall occupy to-morrow in the rear under the cannon of the forts. . . .'

Ten o'clock struck.

'It is time to sleep,' exclaimed Laune, 'as much as you can get. . . .'

Sleep! Du Breuil, though he was over-fatigued, did not feel his fatigue in the state of nervous excitement in which he had been living for the past four days. . . . For a long time he tossed about in his warm feather bed, tormented by fixed ideas, haunted by brief visions. He passed from one thought to another—Bersheim's little lantern at Borny, D'Avol, Baron Hacks, Védél, Lacoste. . . . They were retreating. Why? He was no longer astonished at anything; he was tossed about like a cork on the top of the waves, in the midst of the tumultuous surf of events. Everything turned to trouble. . . . He became drowsy.

The chirping of birds awoke him on the following day. It was broad daylight. Fresh notes issued joyously from their little sonorous windpipes; the foliage of the branches moved against the sky. He had a desire to close his eyes again, and to stretch out once more his tired limbs, but sleep had fled. Out of bed! It was necessary to live, to act, to get rid of the obsession of sorrowful thoughts and bitter reflections. But immediately the nightmare of preceding days again took possession of him. He again entered body and soul into the whirlpool of details of which these short, never-to-be-forgotten hours were to him composed.

The morning passed quickly. Every minute information poured into the chief headquarters from the commanders of the 2nd, the 3rd, and the 6th corps. Orderly officers came dashing up, bearing threatening news; then, introduced into the presence of the Marshal, they came out again, after the lapse of a few moments, with a surprised look on their faces.

The Montaudon division of the 3rd corps was under arms from ten o'clock. Important movements of troops could be distinctly seen on the side of the enemy, which was passing in the distance before the 2nd corps, and massing itself in front of the 3rd in the Génivaux woods. Other columns, continuing their march, directed themselves on our right towards the 4th corps. Everybody anxiously awaited orders. Francastel gave vent to his indignation when in conversation with Floppe. Décherac's smile was nothing more than a nervous habit. Restaud himself was deep in thought.

At ten o'clock, however, an Aide-de-camp of the Marshal's special staff jumped into the saddle. When questioned by his comrades of the general staff, he stated that he was only going to communicate news to General Bourbaki, and to give him a free hand on behalf of the Marshal.

Laune and Charlys exchanged a look. Du Breuil, surprised like themselves, could not help saying to Décherac :

‘A good method of placing a troublesome responsibility on the shoulders of a neighbour ! How do they expect Bourbaki, who is in the rear, to act—he who sees nothing, and who cannot inform himself of anything ?’

General Jarras in turn came out of the Marshal’s house. They then learnt that no advice had troubled the calmness of the Commander-in-Chief. He contented himself by replying to Marshal Lebœuf :

‘You occupy a very strong position. It is for you to hold it.’

He seemed persuaded that the army, thanks to its defensive position, was prepared to resist all attack, and, besides, he did not think that this attack would be serious. . . . As to the weakness of the 6th corps, he troubled himself little with that. His confidence could not be shaken.

However, emissaries followed each other in succession. It was finally learnt about noon that the action had just started by a violent cannonade opened on the 4th corps, and that from one end to the other of the line of battle the German artillery was belching forth with a fracas which announced that the struggle was of the warmest character. It was only at intervals, and even then very indistinctly, that the distant booming was heard, but, judging from the emotion of the Aides-de-camp who arrived from all parts with slackened bridle, there was no question about it—the decisive battle was being fought to-day. This very remoteness from the battle, this indistinct uproar, interjected by long periods of silence, this ignorance in the midst of which they were losing their time, made everybody enervated to the highest degree.

Orderlies were walking the saddled horses up and down by the bridle.

‘Well, we don’t start !’ exclaimed an angry voice from time to time.

The complete staff was awaiting the return of the General, who was at the Marshal’s disposal. All eyes were turned towards the closed door of the calm-looking little house, with its blue slate roof among the trees. Nothing moved. The horses pawed the ground. Laune was mechanically sticking the scabbard of his sabre into the earth.

At last the General appeared.

‘You can unsaddle, gentlemen,’ he said, in an ill-resigned tone of voice.

Eh ? what ? Unsaddle ? The General is mad ! . . . All faces were turned towards him with an air of stupefaction and an incredulous wrinkling of the brows. . . . He had to repeat the order. The Commander-in-Chief considered that the affair could not be serious. It was not worth while troubling themselves. Office work was to be recommenced as soon as possible. They were to occupy themselves with the promotion-table, 'so impatiently awaited by the army.'

The promotion-table ! Du Breuil with difficulty suppressed his sneers. . . . It was indeed a question of the promotion-table at this hour, when Death was mowing men down so near them. He was undertaking to draw it up for them in red ink !

As the horses were moving away, a Captain of dragoons rode up, stopped suddenly before the Marshal's house, and threw his bridle to an orderly. The man was engaged in conversation. He belonged to the 6th corps.

'It's getting very warm at Saint-Privat. . . . At that rate, ammunition will soon run out.'

In the common room were bundles of papers upon folding-tables, and the scratching of pens could be heard. . . . It was stifling inside. The flies, maddened by the heat, were really insupportable. . . . The sound of galloping horses came in through the open windows. . . . Every head was raised. . . . There was a questioning look in every eye. The same expression of anguish and expectancy stiffened their faces. . . . Nothing, still nothing ! . . . And papers accumulated, pens scratched.

At two o'clock they had a quickly passing hope ; the Marshal had just mounted on horseback. They were all preparing to follow him, when General Jarras was informed that he had to see that work was continued. The Marshal had no need of his staff. Five officers only were to rejoin him at Fort Saint-Quentin. Du Breuil was among the number, and consequently was momentarily filled with joy. This inaction, this drudgery of writing, which was using up thirty young officers, boiling over with rage, while a few kilometres away their services were badly needed, was enough to drive one mad.

These five chosen ones were moving away when an artillery Captain, the flanks of whose horse were flecked with foam and blood, met them. Quite out of breath, he asked for information about the position of the reserve park of artillery. Questioned by Du Breuil, he spoke out :

'Canrobert has no more ammunition. . . . Things are going badly. He asks for an infantry division. At first Bazaine had agreed to let him have it. . . . But he has received a letter from I don't know what General announcing that, on the other hand, all is going well. . . . He then shrugged his shoulders, saying to me, "You see!"'

Headed by Laune and two Majors, Du Breuil somewhat in the rear with Francastel, the five officers scaled at a gallop the steep rocky slope of Saint-Quentin. It was a question whether the Marshal was still there.

'He must have reached the battle-field,' said Du Breuil to himself.

Upon reaching the plateau, what was his astonishment to see the Commander-in-Chief, dismounted from his horse, with his back turned towards the horizon in flames, and himself pointing three twelve-pounders against a few Prussian battalions which were stationed on the heights on the Ars side. This strange spectacle surprised even Francastel. Laune could not stand it any longer. Pointing out to the Marshal, who was turned towards the south, the north-west direction, he remarked to him the intensity of the fire. Smoke rose above the woods, in the direction of Amanvillers and Saint-Privat. It was easy to understand that the enemy was bearing down upon our right, in order to drive us into the valley, and, by intercepting the Briey road, stop up our last outlet. But the Marshal contented himself by saying :

'They hold good positions; let them defend them.' Upon seeing Laune's look of astonishment, he added : 'Besides, I am going to send two reserve batteries to the Briey road outlet to guard it, if necessary.'

Aides-de-camp suddenly appeared in search of him. They spurred on their horses to the very feet of the stout man, who watched their approach with indifference, delivered their despatches, saluted, and set off again. The five officers walked about, stupid, struggling hard to understand their chief's thought. What were they doing there? Sometimes the noise of the cannonade almost completely ceased. They anxiously listened, and scrutinized the horizon. The Marshal concentrated his attention, however, on the little diversions which the enemy attempted before Ars, upon which side there was no danger. The cannon of the Place and the fort were sufficient to stop any serious attack.

'Always his fear of being cut off from Metz,' thought Du

Breuil. 'To think that time is passing, and that we are musing here, that the destiny of the army, perhaps that of France, is in the balance at this moment !'

The tall figure of Colonel Charlys suddenly arose near them. He had just concluded his reconnaissance of a line of positions in the rear. He reported on it to the Marshal. Du Breuil then recalled the last words of Floppe. . . . He attached no importance to them. . . . If the Marshal was still thinking of falling back, would he thus leave thousands of men to be massacred? . . . But one of their companions of the chief headquarters arrived. Sent to General Frossard, he had voluntarily pushed forward to the 3rd corps, and brought back news of it. Marshal Lebœuf had just withstood a very vigorous attack, and asked for reinforcements. 'Just now,' he added, 'I met the Light Infantry of the Guard on the Lessy hill with General Boisjol, who will be only too glad to march.' The cannon was no longer heard. Smoke alone arose in the north-west. After one hour, when the Marshal was remounting his horse, the roar of the struggle again broke forth. He did not appear to trouble himself about it, but descended the steep slope at a walk, and crossed the bivouacs of the general reserve of the artillery. The shining guns were arranged in rows in the artillery park. The horses were not even harnessed. The five officers followed him with bowed heads, and in silence. Further on were the reserve batteries of the Guard, which were also unyoked. A distant rumbling was heard. What was Bazaine thinking about to allow these hundred and twenty guns of big calibre to remain there silent, when the 6th corps was without artillery, when the German cannon was everywhere crushing ours? And Du Breuil felt a desire to shout at him, at this stout, blind, and deaf man, whose bowed back and thick neck with its gold embroidery he saw : 'But they are fighting ! they fight ! Go and see !'

The path again rose, and this time issued on to the Plappeville plateau. At this distance, greater still from the battle-field, no noise could be heard. But some officers of the 6th corps passed at a gallop with some caissons, which they were going to refill at the large park. Others came galloping up from General Bourbaki, who asked for the whole of his reserve. The extraordinary calm of the Marshal ended by his suite being impressed.

'Restaud is perhaps right,' thought Du Breuil. 'Perhaps he has special information which puts him at his ease. . . .

It is with a full knowledge of the state of affairs that he places the matter in the hands of his lieutenants. . . . He might be the most incapable of men, and give an account of himself; but in that case he would be acting, trying to impose upon them. He might be worst still, the most cunning of . . . No, no; those thoughts were good enough for Floppe! A Commander-in-Chief could not disinterest himself at this point of the battle, if he really thought that the lot of his troops was compromised by it. The Marshal's long and glorious past, his legendary coolness, and his reputation for being a skilful General, forbade all suspicion. Appearances certainly condemned him. . . . But ought one to pay much attention to appearances?' Du Breuil also recollected that personal bravery which he had more than once admired. If Bazaine acted in this manner it was because he had a reason for doing so. Doubtless there was a reason why he should not be on the very scene of the fight.

Suddenly, as they reached one of the dominating points of the plateau, whence could be seen the Briey road, the Marshal stopped. Laune and Du Breuil were behind him. Civil carriages, train equipages, horsemen of the escort, were fleeing *pêle-mêle* in the direction of Metz. A yellowish cloud whirled into the air. Was it a disbanded convoy or routed artillery? It was not known. The dust prevented one from distinguishing the forms which passed in this appalling panic. The Marshal murmured:

'What can be done with such troops?'

The two officers quivered. They had seen these troops put to the test, and they did not merit this reproach. Du Breuil felt hurt, and tried to catch Laune's eye, but the Colonel was turning away his head.

The two reserve batteries arrived. The Marshal decided upon the position they were to occupy, and, as though he had foreseen everything and repaired everything, set off again with the same impassibility.

On their way, near Plappeville, they met some officers of Bourbaki's staff. The Marshal questioned them. They were going to rejoin their chief.

'Useless!' said Bazaine. 'Everything is going well. The day may be concluded to be at an end. The Guard is going to return.'

A few minutes later the Marshal reached Plappeville, and thanked the officers. Du Breuil watched the large door of the

house open. Orderlies rushed forward. The Marshal had already disappeared. The door silently closed. One could only see the quiet street, a roof shining among the foliage, heavy masses of verdure under the blue sky.

When he entered the common room, Du Breuil was so assailed by questions that he did not know to whom to listen. Those staff officers who had been shut up for hours, who had never stirred from their work, ill disguised their rancour. Half mad with impatience and curiosity, they spoke all at once.

‘What is happening? What! the Marshal did not send anyone to the field of action? Then, things were not serious? The enemy was repulsed?’

The majority received this news with satisfaction. The moment the Marshal returned, and the Guard was going to return, it showed we had victoriously resisted every attack. Besides, here they had heard almost nothing. . . . Floppe alone asked, with a malicious smile :

‘And up there at Saint-Quentin?’

Upon hearing Francastel’s affirmation that he had distinctly heard the noise of a cannonade, but that the Marshal had not seemed to notice it, Floppe’s smile was accentuated.

‘There is no one so deaf as he who——’ he commenced.

A look from Laune cut short the end of the proverb.

The perfidious insinuation refuted the secret preoccupations which for the past two days had not ceased to harass Du Breuil. No! Bazaine could not really be thinking of falling back under Metz! No! Bazaine could not allow Canrobert after Frossard to be crushed with a joyous heart! . . . Could a glorious soldier, in whom the Sovereign and the country had placed their hope, a Marshal of France, be accessible in this solemn hour to such miserable calculations, to such suspicious and shameful thoughts? . . . Besides, how could one suppose an intelligent man to be capable of such a want of comprehension of his interests, of so deep and sudden an ineptitude? The Marshal’s conduct since the morning could only be dictated by the absolute conviction, the certainty, that the army was running no risk.

Evening was falling. For some time the cannon had been silent. No news arrived, but everyone, having become calm again, was confidently waiting. About seven o’clock Du Breuil thought he could hear a low rumbling. Floppe pricked up his ears.

'Ah!' he exclaimed, 'it is recommencing.'

This state of doubt was odious. Du Breuil felt that he could restrain himself no longer. To obtain permission from General Jarras to go in search of news, and to saddle his horse, was the work of a moment.

He now passed over the road, but in an opposite direction, which had led him back to the chief headquarters two hours before. He galloped madly. A cool wind blew in his face. The Mecklenburg horse—decidedly a fine animal—joyously mounted the hill. Du Breuil felt it tightly gripping the bit, felt the solid contact of his boots on its flanks. Once more he saw himself riding side by side with Lacoste, and the two horses fraternizing. A little of the enthusiasm which had transported him then took possession of him. The noise of the cannonade increased in volume. He shot between two woods.

'I shall get there quicker by making for Châtel,' he said to himself.

The day died. Large reddish clouds rose on the left. Near Gros-Chêne he passed the division of Grenadiers and Zouaves of the Guard. These crack battalions were waiting, motionless, their arms at rest. He skirted interminable files of silent men. Companies followed one after the other, their red and blue masses giving an impression of calm, composure, and force. The manly, sunburnt faces, with their stout moustaches, all resembled each other. Du Breuil carried away an impression of admirable troops trembling with expectation.

He still galloped on, little by little intoxicated by his own movement, and the imperious desire to see and to know the increasing uproar of the struggle. The path wound through the wood. Frenzied Aides-de-camp passed, shouting unintelligible phrases. But their faces spoke, and he spurred on his horse. The wood became bright. At the edge he could take in the vast plateau at a glance. The church-tower of a village on his left was blazing. That was Amanvillers. Large gleams and thick smoke rose ahead of him at Saint-Privat. The violence of the cannonade was extreme. The musketry was crackling furiously.

There was no doubt about it—the hour was decisive, the battle was at its height. Du Breuil felt his heart throb. What was to be done? Return whence he came, and warn . . . But a distant uproar murmured ahead. He thought he could hear sublime notes from drums and trumpets

sounding to the charge. . . . Come! it was news of victory which he would carry back. Forward! . . . He passed some batteries on a hillock, which were spitting forth hell fire.

The plain was obscured by a blue smoke. One could only see red flashes and whistling, black flights of shells. Bullets rained down. He went back to the edge of the wood, and proceeded straight in the direction of the sound of the charge. 'They say that blowing the trumpets puts one out of breath!' In proportion as he approached, Du Breuil was astonished not to hear the mad cries of the assault, the rushing forward of battalions. When he reached the Briey main road he stopped, mute with astonishment. Twenty drummers and trumpeters were beating and blowing desperately there, while the sinister stream of routed soldiers swept the road. . . .

'Is it the Guard which is arriving?' cried to him the officer who had ordered the men to sound the charge.

Du Breuil made a sign in the negative.

'We have been thus for the past hour to make believe that reinforcements were coming. . . . Bazaine wishes, then, that we shall be killed here.'

The Saint-Privat church and houses in flames cast their tragic brightness athwart the ruddy haze of night. The fracas of the shells and the intensity of the fusillade caused a continued rumbling. Bands of dismayed soldiers fled along the road *pêle-mêle*, with the whole of the vehicles of the rear. Ah! this lugubrious stream of ambulances, waggons, canteen-carriages, and frightened peasants with carts full of mean furniture. . . . Du Breuil dashed against the current, and stopped the soldiers of the line, who were without rifles.

'What are you doing there?' he cried.

And voices replied: 'We are seeking our regiment.'

Others were marching without uttering a word. Some, who were walking alone, jeered. Upon nearing the village the number of fugitives increased. A regimental band passed. The pale-faced men were running, their instruments in their cases. One large fellow suddenly threw his instrument from him, looking at Du Breuil with an insolent air. Du Breuil was then seized with an inspiration. He felt the energy of his race boil in him; the red blood of his ancestors made him raise himself in his stirrups and cry out. A mysterious force proceeded from his gesture and his order. The pale-faced musicians were conquered, and stopped upon hearing his voice. The instruments leapt from their cases, and, blown

with all the force of the lungs of the men, a wild song—the ‘Marseillaise’—burst forth in the midst of the panic-stricken people, and moved every heart. In the thundering fracas of the evening, with its uproar of tocsins, the national anthem arose, increased in volume, was the very cry of France. Everybody, seized with a sudden intoxication, repeated the ardent strophes, and felt the inspiration of past victories. The soul of a nation filled this crowd in rout, and, as in those epic days when the Fatherland has been in danger, all these fugitives, galvanized, their eyes ablaze, remounted the hill, fused into a single being, which rushed forward to the fight with an irresistible impulse.

Du Breuil, intoxicated, advanced, was pushed forward by the reflux. An anonymous hero, he lived that magnificent hour, which was the culminating point of his life, in a state of unconsciousness. Strange chance which had led him there at that precise minute in order that he might accomplish as he was passing that very simple act in which the whole energy of a race, the existence of its obscure ancestors and his own, were resumed! . . .

Upon arriving at the first houses in the village, a small red speck settled upon his arm. He looked at it in surprise. It was a ladybird, its shining back spotted with black—a small winged creature in the midst of the storm of death. The shells fell with an infernal noise and pierced the walls with holes. Bullets whizzed by hundreds. He saw some soldiers of the line fall back and flee. Drums were beating an order to charge which was not ours. Raucous cheers could be heard: ‘Vorwaertz! Vorwaertz!’ He turned to the right and galloped off. In a garden, behind a wall, a line of foot soldiers were alternately kneeling and lying down, bringing their rifles to their shoulders and firing. The fire was regulated by a Captain.

‘Your turn, Judin.’

The small soldier of the line took careful aim and pulled the trigger.

‘Mouche!’ he exclaimed, rising, ‘I’ve no more cartridges.

‘Your turn, Curly,’ ordered the calm voice.

Laughs arose, and the bald soldier, who was thus named, fired without hurry.

‘Védel!’ cried Du Breuil. . . .

The Captain turned towards his cousin a brave face, upon which was stamped serious and calm determination. Du Breuil was struck by it.

‘What are you doing there?’

Védel hurriedly explained that he had held his ground for seven hours; that the 6th corps, without ammunition, reinforcements, or orders, had at last been crushed, and was retreating. He pointed out the plain, and made a gesture, saying that the Prussian Royal Guard was sleeping there.

Vicomte Judin, black, covered with dust, unrecognisable, listened with a smile.

‘Fine sight, Major, but I like the Opéra quite as well, don’t you know.’

He drew a pipe and a tinder-box from his pocket, and was getting ready to strike a light. Suddenly a bullet sang through the air. Judin turned very pale, the tinder-box fell, blood spurted. His wrist was clean broken. Du Breuil was now carried away in a feverish gallop. The village blazed in the distance. There was the uproar of an assault. He was in the midst of a fusillade; foot-soldiers ran. Védel? Ah yes! he was left down there behind the wall. . . . He had a vision of men who rise to their feet, group themselves around their Captain, and go slowly away. And behind the wall a dark-blue line, which advances with unfurled flags; bayonets shine, trumpets blow—other trumpets than ours. . . . And now train-carriages, waggons, and canteen-carriages roll along in confusion. There? What is there? Foot-soldiers rush forward. . . . A group of officers on horseback are crying with hoarse voices: ‘Long live Canrobert!’ Superb, ahead of the group, is a Marshal of France, who, his body proudly straightened, leads the retreat with an air of sadness and with sparkling eyes.

Night. . . . There is the tramping of troops in flight—in-describable jostlings on dark roads. Sometimes Du Breuil was skirting half-grouped regiments without orders, not knowing if they were to advance, to bivouac, or to go back. Against a wood he recognised in the obscure light of the moon the Grenadiers, and then the Zouaves, of the Guard. Ah! these red and blue masses, drawn up in lines when he first passed them! . . . The irony of these motionless crack troops, which were only waiting for a sign, whilst three kilometres away the crushed 6th corps was giving way, and dragging with it the 4th!

There was a deep road, the sound of horses on the march, the rolling along of cannon and caisson. . . . The smoke of battle, which little by little had dispersed, now seemed to float

in the form of big clouds in the black sky, in which the moon shone splendidly. Du Breuil met two batteries on the march.

'The bivouac of the Guard, Major?' asked a flute-like voice.

Du Breuil looked the officer in the face. He recognised Captain de Serres, with his slender figure and his tight-fitting pelisse. Behind him Lieutenant Thomas was respectfully smiling.

'A hundred yards away,' replied Du Breuil. 'Go straight before you.'

Suddenly, like a flash of light, an idea struck him—D'Avol! These were D'Avol's batteries. The Captain's face saddened.

'Killed?' asked Du Breuil, a lump in his throat.

'I don't think so,' said De Serres.

'What, then?'

'Wounded—disappeared. A shell shattered his shoulder as he was taking orders to the 4th corps, after placing the batteries in position. His horse alone returned.'

The Captain saluted. The cannon moved away. D'Avol now! D'Avol after Lacoste! . . . An infinite lassitude took possession of him. His sorrow, which was cutting when he had certain thoughts, was reduced to a state of dull suffering because of its keenness. Sometimes he obscurely thought: 'If all, however, were not lost! If Frossard and Lebœuf had been able to hold out!' Mechanically he followed the road over which he had ridden a few hours before. Suddenly, near Gros-Chêne, he saw numerous troops massed against the edge of the wood.

A group of officers were listening to an order which was being read by one of them in a loud voice, and in the light of a lantern which a Lieutenant was holding at arm's length. Du Breuil dismounted and approached, while the Mecklenburg horse, as a sign of joy, noisily pawed the ground, and then, firmly fixed on its four legs, violently shook itself with a jingling noise. A General turned his head, and inquired if Du Breuil brought other orders. Upon receiving his explanations, he said in a dry tone of voice, trembling with rage:

'Well, read that, Major!'

Du Breuil stretched out his arm—hallo! the ladybird was still there—and, taking the paper, he read the order, copied in a large sprawling handwriting, that of Francastel. An icy silence reigned. Du Breuil, mute, refolded the paper.

'That is all right, sir. We retreat,' said the General,

addressing the Captain who had brought the order. 'Rally the regiments which you meet on your way.'

Was Du Breuil dreaming? The whole army was going to return with bent head under the cannon of the forts! . . . So many brave men had died in vain. . . .

'It was at headquarters that you were given that?' he stammered.

'Yes,' replied the Captain. 'Those are instructions dictated by Colonel Charlys after his reconnaissance in the afternoon.'

Du Breuil pressed his hand to his forehead.

'And the Marshal—have you seen him?'

'Yes,' replied the other. 'When the 4th corps gave way after the 6th corps, General Ladmirault sent me to inform the Commander-in-Chief. Bazaine gave me the order which you have read, and, in the presence of my despair, he added: "Don't distress yourself, Captain. You would have had to make this retrograde movement to-morrow morning. The only difference is, you are making it twelve hours sooner."''

PART IV.

CHAPTER I.

AN officer of Bazaine's private staff handed Du Breuil the letter which he was to take. The rubicund-cheeked Marshal, who was wearing a tight-fitting spencer, had just had breakfast. He was conversing with a civilian who had the appearance of a magistrate, his back to the chimneypiece. Another officer was consulting a map at a small table. The Marshal questioned a chief medical officer whom Du Breuil had not at first seen.

'We have quite fifteen thousand wounded?'

'Certainly more than that, M. le Maréchal.' . . .

The Aide-de-camp saw Du Breuil to the door. As the Marshal's study was on the ground-floor, he was in the open air immediately. He saw Restaud, who was leaving the house in which General Jarras was lodging with part of the officers of the chief headquarters. Restaud's serious and taciturn look was interrogative. Du Breuil replied :

'I am going to negotiate an exchange of wounded and prisoners near Jussy.'

Restaud said :

'My business is with the outposts. I will accompany you.'

They ordered their horses, first of all going to the apartment which they occupied at the house of Mme. Guimbail, for they were neighbours. Frisch busily occupied himself in helping his master to tie his new shoulder-knots ; his Major must have a fine appearance when he called upon these drinkers of schnaps. All those who had been sent by the enemy to parley were high-class officers, magnificently mounted. A Captain of the King's Hussars, who had come on the previous day to the Ban Saint-Martin, had made a sensation with his brilliant blue uniform, the gold bullion of his epaulets, and his kolback with its white

aigrette. With perfect grace, and in very pure French without an accent, he had asked Décherac to transmit his card to a French officer of his acquaintance.

From the open window could be seen the green expanse of the Ban Saint-Martin full of troops. Here, too, was the bivouac of the Lancers of the Guard, the sight of which was bitter to Du Breuil. His heart ached at the thought of Lacoste, and again when he thought of D'Avol wounded, disappeared. . . . He turned his eyes towards the flowered wall-paper of the small bedroom, the clock under a glass shade on the mantelpiece, and three lithographs in frames. A calendar, the leaves of which were daily torn off, showed the day—Tuesday, under a large 23. Four days already had the army been blocked under Metz!

‘How is Titan?’ asked Restaud.

He was interested, like the whole staff, in Lacoste’s big dog, which Du Breuil had taken in. Since the first night that the dog had howled at Death, it had refused to eat or to drink, and, reduced to skin and bone, was pining away. It did not even moan any longer, but remained stretched out, looking at visitors with enlarged eyes, more than human, full of an infinite sadness. Du Breuil made a gesture of distress. Then Restaud, to change the subject, announced:

‘There are the horses!’

The escort, consisting of a trumpeter and a corporal of the Chasseurs on horseback, the bearer of a small white flag, was waiting in the already cold, rainy day. For some time the two officers rode on in silence. Military men, resigned by discipline as well as by habit, condemned to renounce themselves, speak little, except upon rare, critical occasions, of what deeply concerns them. But there are silences which speak. Du Breuil was the first to break silence. In the solitude of his soul he was stifled, oppressed by the number of these thousands, and by these thousands of men among whom there were perhaps not two in whom he could confide. . . . D'Avol! Lacoste! There was that aching at his heart. . . . At first he had not reflected; the rush of events and Death striking blows with a club around him had stunned, stupefied him. His friends . . . he only now understood how much he had loved them, what a manly, frank, and sure affection he had had for them. Jacques must have fallen into the hands of the Prussians! What a lugubrious agony in the midst of conquerors, or what a sad re-establishment to health, a prisoner

in a foreign town. Death rather than that! Certainly Jacques would prefer it.

Restaud had already several times looked at Du Breuil, and then, owing to a sense of delicacy, turned away his eyes. Their feelings, owing to the fact that they had never been clearly expressed, observed a reserve which was paralyzed by something akin to trouble and uncertainty—the hesitations, the groping about of two noble souls who would like to love each other, but who did not dare or know how. However, Restaud guessed to what an extent his companion was unhappy. He himself was unhappy.

Du Breuil smiled.

‘Who would have told us that three weeks ago?’

Restaud replied, sadness in his eyes, the colour of sandstone, and upon his serious Breton face:

‘I was thinking about it on Sunday evening when I saw the Saint-Quentin slopes covered with hundreds of fires, and heard on all sides the cacophony of military bands. I said to myself, “So much noise for nothing!” And I added, “Since the opening of the campaign our warfare has resembled that.”’

There was a silence, as if each one, of however small account he might be, obscurely, vaguely felt that he was somewhat a party to the weaknesses and the incapacity which had been shown. Du Breuil replied:

‘In the meantime we are blocked in.’

‘We shall get out.’

‘May Bazaine hear you! Look here, Restaud: it is really inexplicable. And a man so brave! We saw him at Borny, and at Rezonville, when he drew his sword on the point of being captured in the charge of the Brunswick Hussars. . . . Frankly,’ repeated Du Breuil, with sincere anguish, ‘why didn’t we break through to Rezonville? We were in a position to do so. Why didn’t the Marshal support Canrobert at Saint-Privat? Why are we taken back to the rear? What is going to become of us, burdened with wounded, cornered in a place where provisions . . . you know the state of the resources which were furnished yesterday—a fortnight’s wheat, a fortnight’s flour, and the remainder in the same proportion? If that is true, what are we waiting for before taking possession of the corn, the grain, and the provender with which the neighbouring villages are full? All the owners in the neighbourhood have come to tell us, and to press us to do so. What are we doing? Nothing!’

'We shall get out,' repeated Restaud, with a tender, obstinate conviction. 'We are already reassured as regards ammunition, the lack of which was the reason for the retreat on the evening of August 16th.'

'It was a mere pretext!' exclaimed Du Breuil.

'They have discovered four million cartridges in the unemptied trucks at the station, and General Soleille's report of yesterday, according to which all our batteries are restocked and our parks are complete, establishes the situation. He also asked that the Marshal make known this good news to the army.'

'Salut, messieurs,' said a timid old man, taking off his cap.

He was in his slippers, standing on the threshold of his door at the spot where the Moulins-lès-Metz road slants off towards Châtel-Saint-Germain. Du Breuil recognised M. Poirét, at whose house he had slept on the night of the Borny fight. The old man insisted, in spite of their refusal, on their accepting a glass of new wine. He walked by the side of their horses.

'Is it true, sirs, that MacMahon is at Étain? He is coming to deliver us, then?'

The officers got rid of him by a vague reply and an imperceptible shrug of the shoulders. He stood on the road which they had taken, and which led to Sainte-Ruffine, watching them move away, his hand held over his eyes to screen them from the light. The horsemen sat erect in their saddles, sullen, wounded by this word of deliverance, which, for those who dare not admit it, summed up the secret hope that MacMahon would appear, and, holding out his hand to the Metz army, raise the blockade.

'It is absurd,' said Du Breuil. 'Supposing that MacMahon's troops are reorganized, where are they to-day? On August 19th the Marshal sent a telegram from Châlons.' He quoted it from memory: "'If you are obliged to very shortly beat a retreat, as I believe you will be, I do not know how to come to your assistance, owing to the distance which I am from you, without uncovering Paris. If you judge otherwise, let me know.'" Bazaine's reply compromised him but little: "I shall very shortly follow the line of northern frontier towns to rejoin you. I will inform you of my march if I can still undertake it without compromising the army."'

He shook his head. For some days his doubts had only increased. Did Bazaine really think of rejoining MacMahon and the Emperor? Did he not prefer to remain free, to act as

he liked? His conduct of August 16th and 18th remained inexplicable. Some authorities, moreover, refused to admit the presence, the very existence, of MacMahon's army. Canrobert had explained himself on that point, with his usual frankness, before the officers of his staff.

'Let us count on ourselves alone,' said Restaud.

'In the meantime we are blockaded!' repeated Du Breuil.

It was his fixed idea, and it had been shared by the town and the army for the past four days.

He pointed with outstretched hand to the open sky, the fields, and the woods. In the rear was a regiment in camp; there, some batteries; ahead was a company of the Grand'garde behind a fortified trench; beyond was a space, then a line of outposts, and further away still double sentinels.

'Isn't it curious to think that we are surrounded by an invisible force, by a network of death, the meshes of which we can only break by tearing ourselves and letting fresh blood? Do you know the number of our last losses?—12,273 men. Our wounded? More than 15,000, the Marshal was saying just now.'

He watched a bird, an eagle or a sparrow hawk, which was flying at a great altitude towards the south-west.

'He is free,' he said.

Restaud bowed his head.

Du Breuil continued:

'Isn't it strange to think that a few days ago we were in communication with the whole of France? The telegraph-wire was cut at Nancy on August 12th, at Brieux on the 18th, and at Thionville on the 19th. On the last date I received a letter from my father. When shall we receive fresh mails? God only knows!'

He became excited, struck by this idea—the army was similar to a monster spider in the middle of its web, and by a vast network of wires connected with the country; but now all the wires had been cut, and the army was isolated. The fate of battles, the destiny of so many thousands of men, was held in the hollow of the hand of an emissary, of a ranger, of a police agent, rare and courageous men who, at the peril of their lives, crossed the enemy's lines, and who, arrested, searched, ill-treated, slid into streams of water, alongside hedges and ditches, carrying the precious little despatch rolled in the form of a cigarette or inside an indiarubber ball—the flimsy piece of paper upon which depended the march of armies and the

salvation of France. Du Breuil and Restaud spoke with emotion of rangers, with their frank faces, their sunburnt hands, and their dusty feet. They repeated the names of these obscure heroes. One of them, on August 20th, had brought a despatch from General-Commissary Wolf; another, the ranger Braidy, as soon as he had arrived, brought his message sewn in the vamp of his boot. The police agent Flahault, who came from Thionville on August 20th, set off the next day with despatches for Colonel Turnier, the commander of the town.

Restaud reined up on a level with the two sentinels, who, sheltered behind a hedge, were keeping a look-out on the zone of land which lay before them. They were two soldiers of the line with deep-set eyes, drawn features, and they looked at the officers with a kind of cunning astonishment.

‘Good luck!’ exclaimed Restaud.

At the same moment bullets whistled through the air.

‘Don’t remain there,’ said Du Breuil.

And he took his sword in hand. Cydalise crossed the thicket. Preceded by the escort, he advanced in the midst of rifle-shots. The white flag, well in view, fluttered in the air. The trumpeter, who was at the side of the man who carried the flag, turned round. Dark helmets could be seen.

‘Halt!’ cried Du Breuil. ‘Trumpeter, blow!’

The three strident bugle-notes rang out, with an interval between each. At the last note only did the bullets cease singing through the air. A horseman arose in view on the edge of the intrenchments. Du Breuil slowly replaced his sword in his scabbard. Raucous voices and wild gestures requested him to turn round. He obeyed the order, but found the custom a hard one. There was the sound of a galloping horse, and a ceremonious Captain of hussars, tall and stiff, came up and saluted him. Upon stating that he had a communication for General von Goeben, the officer replied in French:

‘Certainly; will you follow me?’

Du Breuil had on the tip of his tongue a dry reproach:

‘Your soldiers fire upon those sent to parley.’

He kept silent through pride, resembling Cydalise, who commenced to step high as for a defile at a review. The officer looked at her flatteringly.

‘You have a fine animal there, sir!’

Du Breuil was displeased that this man should praise Cydalise. He replied, after glancing at the other’s mount:

‘It is, as a matter of fact, a fine animal.’

Then only did he feel a little pleasure of superiority.

Another hussar — a bearded non-commissioned officer — arrived. Du Breuil had to dismount. In order to prevent a German from touching Cydalise, he quickly threw the bridle to his trumpeter, a thin lascar pitted with small-pox. They now bandaged his eyes in silence. Held by the arm like a blind man, he walked as though in a nightmare. The officer courteously warned him of obstacles. Du Breuil heard around him the noise of earthworks in course of construction, the striking of pickaxes on stone, the shovels being forced into the ground, the throwing up of the sliding earth, and further away the heavy work of paving with paving-beetles. Foreign voices struck upon his ear; they murmured: ‘*Françose! Françose!*’ Soldier-like smells, acrid and savage, offended his nose. Suddenly they stopped. A voice of command asked him for the letter which he brought. He heard a correct ‘*Danke ihnen!*’ Conducted into a deep road, the firmer earth of which resisted under his feet, his bandage fell off. It was a relief to him to see the sky, the leaves, and the earth again. His guide, the Captain, was politely smiling at him. Du Breuil also smiled feebly. Recently he had thought of those who are going to be shot; now he again saw himself a child occupied in playing blindman’s buff. The officer introduced himself as Count Schels-Trauben. Du Breuil in turn gave his name. The restrained conversation, interrupted by silences, finished by consisting of weighed words. The Captain accompanied him to Jussy, to the slope of the hills which descend towards Metz. There he waited for three hours for General von Goeben’s reply. He could only see around him abandoned houses. A pillaged habitation, called the *château*, showed its doors burst in, and pieces of furniture and empty bottles covered the lawns of the park. He turned away his eyes. Count Schels-Trauben seemed to see nothing; he had straightened up his tall figure, and was drawing an emblazoned case from his pocket.

‘Do you smoke?’

Upon Du Breuil’s refusal he took a cigar and lighted it.

The little case which he used was French: one could see on its coloured pasteboard side a cuirassier paying court to a fellow-countrywoman. Doubtless the cigar was French. Seeing the officer mechanically draw towards him a branch of a mirabelle plum-tree, Du Breuil felt a pain in his heart. Was the Count Schels-Trauben going to do him the honours with

this fruit? He saw a vision of pillaged farms, provender spoilt, and provisions destroyed. What was the good of buying when they could take? It was war! . . . Ah! doubtless he would have contemplated these things with more indifference if victorious in Germany . . . but here, on French land, in his own country! It was too much! . . . A noise of fine falling rain made him turn his head. Count Schels-Trauben had let go the branch, and the ripe mirabelles were crushed on the ground by their fall. He discreetly moved away.

Du Breuil, alone, breathed again. He was suffering. The extensive landscape filled his eyes. On his right stretched out the beautiful valley of the Moselle, the gray day bathing its carpet of stubble, its vine-covered slopes, and its vineyards, in a humid atmosphere. The river divided the town by its sparkling waters; the tower of the cathedral, dominating the roofs, raised on high the tricolour flag. Facing him, on the opposite side of the mountain, stretched out the Scy slopes, where, more than once in the days of his youth, he had been with D'Avol to drink the pretty pink wine at farmers' houses. The Saint-Quentin fort crowned the summit with its heavy mass, and every now and then thundered forth in a deep voice. An old woman, dressed in a petticoat and sabots, appeared, and behind her a white-haired man bent double. Others came—a young crippled boy, a woman with red eyes, as though she had been weeping blood, old men leaning upon crutches, and a grandmother with doddering head. They approached him, saluted, and complained in a low voice, with many disquieted looks. The cripple showed his arm, black and swollen, in consequence of a blow from the butt-end of a rifle. An old man spoke of vines torn down, and the fruit still green. One could hear the great subdued noise of the enemy working at the earthworks. The bayonets of the sentinels shone. Every time that the Saint-Quentin thundered, all these poor people looked towards the fort, an obscure, melancholy hope passing over their faces. He divided what money he had between them. Then, as the Prussian officer was returning, they moved away.

Mollified and eased in his mind, he suffered him without hatred. Both avoided looking at each other. They spoke of one thing and another, but that which they did not say remained between them, and kept them at a distance.

They were bringing General von Goeben's reply, so his torture was drawing to a close. Five minutes afterwards he

was descending at a gallop, followed by his flag-bearer and trumpeter, the path which led to Sainte-Ruffine.

It was with a feeling of enthusiasm that he again entered the enclosed camp and again took up his soldier's post. With what joy he had again seen the ruddy face of the flag-bearer, the thin, pock-marked face of the trumpeter. Ah, to return once more to French territory, to see once more French soldiers of the line, and no more to meet the enemy unless with revolver and sword in hand! The enemy was not the heavy barbarian one ran up against in the thick of the *mêlée*, in the midst of the feverish rush and the smoke; it was Baron Hacks or this stiff, correct, courteous hussar . . . this Prussian had behaved most decorously! Parbleu! it was exactly that which irritated him.

Upon re-entering the Ban Saint-Martin, he found that the Marshal's officers wore an air of mystery. Colonel Charlys was leaving Bazaine's study, his lips compressed, and a pre-occupied look in his eye. The Marshal took the letter which Du Breuil handed to him, read it, and, without asking for further information, threw it on the table, saying indifferently: 'That is all right, Major.'

He went to the offices, and noticed there a tall ranger, who wore his beard trimmed *en collier*—the beard of the Anabaptists. The man was answering Laune's questions. Charlys entered, made a sign, and the ranger followed him. Laune also went out, and the two Colonels conversed with the man outside for some time. Du Breuil made inquiries. Décherac said to him:

'It is believed that he is the bearer of a despatch from MacMahon. The Marshal is coming to our assistance by way of the north.'

'Let us bet, then,' said Floppe, 'that we shall leave by the south. A good method, so as not to meet.'

Laune re-entered, but would say nothing. Outside, the rumour spread about that a despatch had been brought by an emissary of MacMahon. They were talking about it in the town, Du Breuil learnt on the following day, and already with exaggeration. . . . MacMahon had arrived at Montmédy with seventy batteries of twelve-pounders, drawn by twenty-two thousand Paris omnibus horses!

Thanks to the exchange of prisoners and information obtained by Charlys, they could again be described as almost equal in forces to the enemy. It was known that on August 18th the

King of Prussia had himself been at the head of the German army. To-day two hundred thousand men blockaded us. Six corps, belonging to the first and second armies commanded by Frederick Charles, closed the circle; two other corps were reported near Roncourt and on the Briey road. The sortie would be hot! What direction would they take? Opinions were divided on the question.

‘Why not make for the east,’ said one, ‘and thus cut off the communications with Germany, taking the Prussians in a trap between the Vosges and the Meuse?’

Décherac proposed:

‘By advancing to the south, supported on the flanks by the Moselle and the Seille, we should cut the Red Prince’s lines of operation, and as soon as we had reached Frouard we should threaten those of the Prince Royal.’

‘Well,’ said Francastel, ‘I should drive the enemy from the Saint-Privat positions, re-open the Briey road, and reach the Meuse as quickly as possible.’

‘Yes, Pichrocole!’ murmured Floppe, who had read Rabelais.

Massoli took no further interest in the question.

‘What I don’t understand,’ he said in his loud voice, ‘is that the Marshal has not yet distributed the rewards, nor made the mentions on the order of the army. The bravery of our troops in these three fights merited something better than a bombastic general order.’

The rosette hypnotized the stout man. It seemed to him that he ought to profit by the heroism of others. Francastel said:

‘Upon my faith, a piece of red ribbon would suit more than one.’

He would have liked to have been this one. Looks converged towards Du Breuil. His brilliant action on the evening of the 18th—the ‘Marseillaise’ stopping the current of fugitives—was known. Laune and Charlys had warmly congratulated him upon it.

The necessity of making a sortie, of stretching out a hand to MacMahon, and the impossibility of further inaction under the walls of Metz, were becoming apparent to the whole army. After the glorious series of recent fights, each one, still quivering with excitement, only asked to conquer, every soul stretched towards the hope of a decisive battle.

Bazaine, apparently faithful to his plan of the 19th, transmitted by despatch to the Emperor: ‘I still count upon taking

a north-easterly direction, and throwing myself by way of Montmédy on to the main road from Sainte-Menehould to Châlons, if it is not too strongly occupied. In the contrary case, I shall march by way of Sedan, and even by Mézières, to reach Châlons.' He was faithful, it appeared, to his despatch of the 23rd: ' . . . There only remains on horseback on the two banks of the Moselle the armies of Prince Frederick Charles and General Steinmetz. . . . If the above news is confirmed, I shall be able to undertake the march which I have previously indicated by the northern fortresses, so as to compromise nothing. . . .' Bazaine had at first thought of taking the Thionville main road.

After crossing the Orne at its confluence, they would make their way by forced marches along the Longwy and Longuyon roads. But the danger of advancing in a very narrow valley under a pelting fire from the heights soon brought about a change of plan. The sortie would be made by Sainte-Barbe. There there was plenty of space, deployment was easy, numerous roads led towards the north. The arrangements which were made foreshadowed the departure. These were: an order to reduce the baggage, in case they had to march; an order to General Coffinières to throw two bridges over the arm of the Moselle forming the Île Chambière; joining of the reserve cavalry to General Desvaux's division; reorganization of the artillery of the 6th corps.

These measures greatly excited the minds of men; recollections of Borny and Rezonville revived confidence. Notwithstanding frequent panics, the disorder, the relaxation of discipline, the instincts of marauding—notwithstanding all the elements of dissolution which this army, up to the present badly commanded, badly cared for, badly fed, might drag after it, Bazaine's soldiers were possessed of an invincible force. Magnificent regiments, old soldiers of the Italian and Crimean campaigns, of the Imperial Guard, formed unbreakable blocks in this immense, moving agglomeration of men. A single cry—'March!'—rose to every lip. A chief to lead them—that was what everybody, from the commander of a corps to the most humble foot soldier, demanded. Du Breuil, at the present time, knew these innumerable faces, sometimes wearing an expression of sad lassitude, sometimes that of deep rage—these eyes which did not understand, these mouths which spat forth invective, these arms which fell with stupor. There was not a gesture which did not express incomprehension at so many

forces sacrificed and lost. An ardent life now reappeared upon faces; eyes were ablaze at the thought of fighting at last, no longer on a guarded position, but drummers drumming to the charge—a dash forward with the French fury of old! Du Breuil had received a striking impression of it as he passed near the Lancers of the Guard, who were cantoned under his windows.

Three were talking among themselves.

‘It’s going to be warm work!’ one was saying.

‘Not too soon,’ murmured the other.

And the third, Saint-Paul, the old Saint-Cloud quartermaster who had been a witness of the death of Lacoste, was sharpening his sabre in savage silence, a strange smile under his enormous moustache. He raised his eyes towards Du Breuil. A bond of silence connected them, with a feeling of sympathy on the part of Du Breuil and embarrassment in the case of both of them. Recollecting the slight humiliation which he had inflicted upon him at Saint-Cloud—‘Come now, quartermaster, wake up!’—Du Breuil thought he could always read a reproach in the veteran’s unchangeable respect. However, the interest which they had for Musette, Lacoste’s fine animal, drew them together. Old Saint-Paul jealously watched over her since she had entered the rank. This time again Du Breuil stopped and obtained news of the mare. He added:

‘She will soon walk.’

The veteran, resting on his sabre, said in a jovial voice, a distant look in his eyes:

‘Fatigue is good; it’s rest which is worth nothing.’

They were conversing in the offices about the visit which Generals Soleille and Coffinières were paying the Marshal at that moment. The former was the commander of the artillery of the army; the latter was the commander of the Engineers and Governor of Metz, so that they lent to events a considerable importance. He found out nothing of their conversation. In the evening Décherac related to Du Breuil:

‘Disagreement is now spreading to Charlys and Jarras. I had just taken some documents to the General’s room when Charlys entered. “General,” he said, “here are the movement orders which the Marshal ordered me to make out yesterday. Will you kindly take note of them?” The General replied: “Get the Marshal to sign them.” And when Charlys was insisting, he said: “You made them out; get them signed.”’

The troops were to raise the camp on the following day, August 26th, at daybreak. The 2nd, 4th, and 6th corps and the Guard, which were massed on the left bank since August 19th, would cross the Moselle by way of the town and the two bridges of the Île Chambièrè. The 3rd corps, which since August 22nd had passed on to the right bank, would establish itself behind Noisseville. The Marshal meant to give his instructions on the field. It had rained the whole of the day. Du Breuil found the night very long in that small house of the Ban Saint-Martin, where he had lived for the past week. He did not sleep, tormented by the deaths of those whom he had loved so much—Lacoste and D'Avol; those whom he had known—Vacossart, Kelm, and others.

The Bersheims? Du Breuil had neither had the time nor the courage to visit them. What was the good of going to receive their compassion? . . . He was thinking of Anine. Compassion? Was that the sentiment she would feel? He felt his soldier's pride lessened. In the morning Frisch informed him that Titan was dead. He went to see the animal, and found that it was stiff. Mme. Guimbail, the landlady, a dry young woman dressed in black, whom one never met on the staircase or in the passages, was there. She blushed at being surprised in her nightcap, and disappeared. Frisch stroked Titan's head.

'He had a bigger heart than a man,' he said.

The sky was cloudy, the dampness penetrating. Showers fell between the intervals of sunshine. Since dawn troops were passing over the Moselle, an interminable avalanche of regiments over the trembling wooden bridges. They marched with a monotonous rumbling, a confused uproar, enthusiasm, resignation, and hope stamped upon their faces. Behind them rose an unsavoury and powerful smell. . . . Aides-de-camp and estafettes brought in news. The 2nd corps had set off at three o'clock in the morning by the Pont des Morts, and the town. No mishap had occurred on that side. But there had been stoppages at the bridges up and down stream, which had been thrown over the two arms of the Île Chambièrè. The downstream bridge, built with old trestles in order to economize the new *matériel* of the army, could bear neither cavalry nor artillery. Cannon, caissons, ammunition waggons, and horses of the 6th corps, were forced to go considerably out of their way to cross the other bridge, which was reserved for the 4th corps. Although all the baggage had been left at Chambièrè,

the crowding of the troops on the length of the acclivity in the village of Saint-Julien was enormous. They only advanced with extreme slowness, and, as upon every occasion, behind-hand.

The condition of the chief headquarters, around the Marshal's house, was feverish, agitated, and sullen. The horses bridled, they had waited since nine o'clock for the order to set off. What ill-omened sadness hovered over the groups they knew not. They spoke to each other in low voices. Comments were made upon the attitude of Soleille and Coffinières. Although their conversation with the Marshal on the previous day had not transpired, they thought they knew the sense of it. They had no doubt that they had used all their efforts to induce Bazaine to remain under Metz, Soleille always timorous, and Coffinières preoccupied about the fate of the town. This very morning, they were assured, they had presented to him an explanatory note, in which they reproduced their arguments, throwing the whole responsibility in advance on the shoulders of the Commander-in-Chief. What was more, Coffinières presented himself at the Marshal's house, and again insisted. His reasons were the necessity for keeping Metz as a base of operations, the advantage of immobilizing the whole of the enemy's army; MacMahon would have time to reconstitute himself, Paris to organize her defence. His great fear was that Metz, with her insufficiently armed forts, her garrison of nineteen thousand men and four thousand National Guards, would not hold out a fortnight. . . . General Soleille was no less anxious. In spite of the reassuring note of August 22nd, were the supplies sufficient for several battles? There was indeed a convoy of provisions at Thionville, but they had not yet arrived at that place.

'It's too bad, all the same!' murmured Floppe. 'The Marshal doesn't now seem so disposed to leave. If he listens to them now!'

Du Breuil was sad, as though a misfortune was going to happen to him. He no longer, however, wore Mme. de Guëronic's opal on his finger. Bah! it was only the consequence of a bad night. He thought of his landlady; the widow had timidly asked him, when the time came for saying good-bye, to accept some provisions for the journey. These people of Lorraine had good hearts. He looked at his watch. Why did they not leave? . . . Charlys was white. One more who had slept badly. . . .

A shower was falling. What mud already! It was a sad thing for the troops, under arms since three o'clock in the morning, large droves on the march packed together down there on the Saint-Julien slope. How they knocked them up, how little they thought of their needs and of their tiredness! Really, ought not the chief of the general staff to have seen to the employment of the roads which lead to the plateau? Why did he not make use of the officers of the staff? There was another squall. Half-past eleven! In the saddle at last! They set off.

'You see we shall do nothing to-day,' said Massoli. 'All this slowness gives the enemy time to place themselves in defence.'

A few mounted Chasseurs only as the escort; the whole of the staff, more than fifty officers, were following the Marshal.

Near the Thionville railway-station they met General Bourbaki. The Marshal informed him that he had to be at the Saint-Julien headquarters, upon his arrival, with the commanders of the army corps. Du Breuil shook hands with Major Carrouge, one of Bourbaki's officers. Ten minutes afterwards, Major d'Homolle, of Bazaine's private staff, went to order the commander of the Guard to suspend the movement and await fresh orders.

'What was I telling you?' exclaimed Massoli.

He bent his head.

As they were crossing the Moselle torrents of water poured upon the cortège. Certain of them buried their necks in their macferlanes; others pulled down their pointed hoods still further over their heads. The storm brought with it black clouds; the water penetrated the coats, entered the boots; the horses slipped, and with their hoofs made the pools of water splash around.

'Poor devils!' said Restaud.

He was thinking of the soldiers since the reveille; the regiments besmeared, the cannon stuck in the mire, and the horses also, which made it all the harder to get along.

Massoli appeared astonished.

'This frog-juice is for everybody.'

'We have no need to be pitied,' protested Restaud.

'I beg your pardon. I have not had my breakfast.'

'Nor I either,' said Restaud very dryly.

Massoli, who was annoyed, reined in his horse, and placed himself at the side of Floppe. They espoused their ill-will.

Floppe could make fun at his ease of the *poseurs*—Restaud, Du Breuil, and Laune.

Outside the town the country presented a picture of nothing but devastation—villas razed to the ground, trees cut down, fields cut up, orchards sacked. Placing it in a state of defence, the pillage of convoys and soldiers had made a desert of this sweet country. The land, broken up by vehicles, upraised, hollowed out by shells, revealed its entrails. A terrible stench arose. There were dead bodies which had been badly buried. Here and there one heard rifle-shots, the booming of cannon. The rain redoubled in violence, the thunder rumbled, the wind blew a hurricane.

‘Never shall we be able to fight in such weather,’ said Francastel.

They reached the Château de Grimont, which was guarded by the 60th Regiment of the line. They dismounted, and awaited the commanders of the army corps whom Bazaine had apprised.

‘Regular scenery for a melodrama, isn’t it?’ said Laune to Charlys, pointing out the fortified house, the shutters hanging down, the windows stopped up with sacks of earth, the garden walls provided with loopholes, and the wood, which stretched ahead, cut down, all the trees lying on the ground.

A singular smile came on Charlys’ face.

‘May you not be a prophet without knowing it!’ He added ironically: ‘It rains too hard to attempt anything. The Marshal will quickly convince these gentlemen of it. Not melodrama, but farce, will be played.’

The commanders of the corps appeared one after the other, followed by their staffs. They provoked various feelings—sympathy in the case of Canrobert, esteem in the case of Ladmirault. Lebœuf and Frossard atoned for their mischief by the fact that they had been unfortunate. There was a silence when Coffinières, a giant with Gaulish moustache, passed by. They also feared the importance of General Soleille. Du Breuil shook hands with Laisné, who was accompanying Frossard, and with Blache, who, behind Lebœuf, was shaking himself, grumbling the while. He saw with pleasure Comte de Cussac. A small man with a curled beard came up to him all smiles, an Israelitish grace in his mischievous eyes; it was Major Gex, of Canrobert’s staff. Other officers, attached to Soleille and Coffinières, and Bazaine’s two nephews, were there. A chaplain, the Abbé Trudaine, approached Du Breuil.

‘Well, Major, this is less warm than at Bruville. After fire, water.’

He always had tobacco in his pockets, but in offering some of it, he saw in despair that it was wet.

‘Vill you haf some try?’ said a voice.

Du Breuil was astonished to see Gugl, his shoulders huddled under an old green waterproof. The Jew, raising an oil-cloth, brought to view the large box with a glass top which he carried at his waist. It contained all kinds of things—tobacco, matches, flasks of rum, and nougat. Gugl, in the presence of Du Breuil’s surprise, mumbled:

‘It is very hart to earn one’s liflihoot.’

He smiled a humble and cunning smile, passed off a bad piece of money on to Trudaine with his change, and, huddling his shoulders still closer together, slipped into the midst of other groups with a begging eye.

‘The council has commenced,’ Décherac announced.

Silence reigned.

‘Do you know,’ he added, lowering his voice, ‘what the Marshal let slip in the presence of Jarras when coming here?’

“What will they say to me?” Strange, isn’t it?’

‘You’ll laugh at me,’ Restaud confided to Du Breuil, ‘but I’m feeling wretched. Just look around us.’

Du Breuil saw Laune impatient. Charlys, a head taller than everybody else, was gazing fixedly into the distance. Colonel Jacquemère was looking desolated, but perhaps only on account of his swollen cheek. The others, in a group with their backs to the storm, were morose and silent. The squall was cutting. Claps of thunder echoed in the distance. Groups wandered about in the low rooms, camped in the kitchens and under sheds. They no longer spoke in an ordinary tone, but whispered. The longer the conference up there continued, the more the disquietude increased. The minutes passed by and seemed like hours. And down there, on the roads and in the fields, receiving the pelting rain with bowed backs, the motionless regiments were waiting with mournful countenances and hollow stomachs.

‘There’s Bourbaki!’ said Floppe.

The commander of the Guard, covered with mud, superb, full of enthusiasm, arrived, and, throwing from him his horse’s bridle, rushed away.

‘Doesn’t look very comfortable!’ exclaimed De Cussac.

‘Well!’ explained Major Carrouge, who dismounted, very

excited, 'we were delayed by the crowded bridges. Then we looked in vain at Saint-Julien for Bazaine. . . . Is there bad news from MacMahon? Why don't we march?'

'Because it is raining!' said Blache brutally.

They nudged him with their elbows. One of Bazaine's nephews was passing at his side.

'I don't care a damn!' growled the Wild Boar.

He looked at the Abbé Trudaine, who had reached his little cart and was whipping his horse.

'That honest priest,' he said, 'would be better at home.'

Major Gex was seized with a fit of sneezing. People coughed and yawned ferociously. Floppe, whose cigarette had gone out, asked for some matches.

'Buy some from the Jew,' said Du Breuil.

They looked for Gugl. He had disappeared. Comte de Cussac bet:

'Fifty louis that we do not break through.'

Sly looks were given. A vibrating voice cried out; it was Bourbaki calling for his Aide-de-camp, Major Leperche.

'Go inform General d'Auvergne to order the whole of the Guard and the general reserve of artillery to immediately resume their morning camps.'

'The farce is played,' said Charlys to Laune.

Cussac chuckled:

'I should have robbed you of your fifty louis, gentlemen. I knew the Marshal would return to the Ban Saint-Martin this evening. He left his Guard there, and his baggage is not yet packed.'

Bourbaki left. The conference still continued. The consternation was general. Restaud was looking at Cussac with eyes expressive of irritated suffering. Laisné was struck by his physiognomy, and pulled out his long moustache with an air of perplexity.

'All this is very sad, sir.'

More minutes passed, or were they hours? The Marshals reappeared—Canrobert, his eyes animated; Lebœuf and Ladmirault, hooded and sorrowful. The staffs dispersed. There was the pawing of horses, brief adieus, and from mouth to mouth passed the dreaded news: 'No sortie will be made . . . the bad weather . . . the troops return. . . .' The 2nd corps was remaining on the right bank, the 4th and the 6th corps were recrossing the Moselle, and establishing themselves on the left bank.

Retreat ! the eternal retreat !

‘It is not raining so much,’ said Du Breuil.

The escort, with mud to the tops of their boots, slowly, funereally, gradually, proceeded on horseback to headquarters. ‘We have no need of pity,’ Restaud had said. But the troops, Du Breuil was thinking—the troops soaked to the skin, a slow and interminable confused mass of men with empty stomachs, who proceeded in the night, step by step, halt after halt, to regain their bivouacs transformed into lakes ! . . . The rain ! he thought with rage—to make the rain an excuse for not fighting ! Was it not also raining for the Prussians ? . . . Laune was ahead, listening to Jarras with bowed head. He returned, and said to Charlys :

‘It was what I feared. Coffinières insisted upon us not leaving Metz. General Soleille pleaded the insufficiency of ammunition. We only have sufficient left for one battle.’

‘Then, we remain ?’ exclaimed Charlys. ‘And the others, they said nothing ? They did not protest ?’

‘They came round to Bazaine’s opinion.’

‘But did he speak of MacMahon ?’

‘No ; not a word.’

Charlys trembled.

‘What is the matter ?’ asked Laune.

‘Nothing.’ Then he said, very low : ‘If you knew !’

It was a gloomy re-entrance across the town. The inhabitants were at the doors, wearing an astonished, sad, suspicious air. The troops which they overtook were mute and harassed, and cast at the silent group of the staff looks expressive of blame and irony. There was nobody to whom the prospect of remaining under Metz, blockaded, useless, with the running out of the provisions and the provender in view, the slow slipping into the quicksands of the enfeebled army, did not appear unacceptable. . . .

‘It is fine !’ said Du Breuil in astonishment.

A ray of sunshine slipped between the clouds. The blue patch of clear sky enlarged, the weather became moderately cool, radiant, the thousand pools of water shone. Each drop of water sparkled ; one could see the wet bayonets shine, the embroidery and the gold on the uniforms light up. But it was only an ironical smile of the sky, and when the escort had re-entered the Ban Saint-Martin the rain recommenced, heavy, violent, inexorable.

CHAPTER II.

ON the following day rain was still falling. Du Breuil watched it as it fell, standing at the window of his little bedroom, which he had found just as he had left it, in the house of Mme. Guimbail. Nothing was changed in the aspect of the muddy, cut-up Ban Saint-Martin. Only the Lancers of the Guard no longer bivouacked there. The calendar on the wall showed that the day was Sunday, August 28th. It was just a month since the Emperor entered Metz with his son, his household, his equipages, the glorious cortège of victories of the reign—all the illusions of this fatal war.

There came a knock at the door. Some orderly, was it ?

‘Come in !’

A corpulent, smiling, florid gentleman appeared, and announced his name :

‘Dumaine.’

He it was who had had the pleasure of announcing to the Major the Sarrebrück success. He gave a sigh. They had dined together one month before at the house of those excellent Bersheims, and had eaten that evening an admirable truffled turkey. He gave another sigh. Ah ! they would not eat such a one to-day. . . . Everything was getting dear ; potatoes were priceless, and salt would soon be lacking. What was going to become of them ? . . . He stated the object of his visit :

‘It’s Bersheim who sent me to capture you. Are you at liberty, Major ? Come and have luncheon with us. My phaeton is below.’

Always affectionate, always kind, were the Bersheims. It happened that Du Breuil had a few hours’ leisure. M. Dumaine’s old horse set off at a crooked trot.

‘Well,’ said the stout man with satisfaction, ‘they shot him this morning.’

‘Who is that ?’

‘That rascal, the spy Schull, who was sentenced to death on Sunday last by the court-martial. A very intelligent man, Major. He drank his *café au lait* as usual. I know the pastor who accompanied him.’ He winked his left eye, and said mysteriously : ‘There are swarms of spies. How can you

expect it to be otherwise, with this quantity of Germans that they took good care not to expel from Metz! . . . But you are very serious, Major. However, MacMahon's triumph——'

Du Breuil looked him in the face.

'Come, now! I'm not the one to inform you of it? . . . A Chasseur d'Afrique brought the news yesterday evening to the Café Parisien. Metz was in a flutter of excitement. Only, by a decree issued by Coffinières, the cafés are closed at nine o'clock, so that when they wanted to find the soldier nobody was there. What did he say? Unheard-of things. . . . A great fight under the walls of Verdun. MacMahon has killed thirty-five thousand Prussians! Steinmetz is thought to be among the dead. I am inventing nothing. It is in the newspaper.'

He drew from his pocket the *Indépendant de la Moselle*. Du Breuil, incredulous, ran his eye over the newspaper, which also related the audacity of German spies, and prescribed sanitary measures for the removal of soiled lint, which was being carted away by tons.

M. Dumaine then said:

'Ah! what a pity! You won't recognise our beautiful Esplanade. It is covered with tents, and on the Place Royal are railway waggons full of beds. What wounded! Metz is nothing but a hospital.'

He enumerated the public buildings transformed into ambulances—the Lycée, the Jesuits' College, the convents, schools, orphanages, the new tobacco manufactory, the Palais de Justice, the Prefecture, the Fabert Garden, the hospitals, the Grand Seminary, the Sacré Cœur, the École Normale, the Bishop's Palace, the prison, the barracks, the Jews' almshouse, the Protestant convent, the Ligue de l'Enseignement, the Masonic lodge, and the École d'Application.

'The Bishop visits the ambulances every day. The Mayor, the Prefect, and Mme. Odent set an example of devotion; each rivals the other in zeal. The town has built large sheds on the Polygone of the Île Chambière. Private individuals throw open their houses. There is not an inhabitant who has not his wounded. I've three of them as my share.'

He omitted to state that he had chosen them only slightly injured, in order to have to give less care to them, but that his bad calculation had been defeated, because they got better, and ate like ten men.

'What are lacking,' he added, 'are doctors.'

In order to increase the medical resources of Metz, they had sent into the town the staffs of all the divisionary ambulances, only leaving a single ambulance for each army corps. Civilian medical officers looked after the wounded in the sheds on the Polygone.

'There it is like it is on the Esplanade,' said Dumaine; 'the air carries away the miasmata.'

And he expressed his disquietude on account of the crowding in closed buildings; he feared typhus, hospital gangrene, etc.

'In addition to that,' he said, 'they fear the medicine may run out.'

His whip indicated the houses transformed into ambulances; they were marked out by the Geneva flag. Entire streets exhaled the odours of phenol and chlorine. Through the windows one could see beds, prostrate forms, white faces, and, coming and going, the coat of a doctor or the cap of a nun. They became silent upon meeting a covered tumbrel, which was carrying the dead.

'There are more than fifteen wounded at the Bersheims,' continued Dumaine. 'Allez, Coco!'

The old horse crossed the paved cathedral square. The modern Greek front, built under Louis XV., always jarred upon Du Breuil, on account of its disproportion to the immense Gothic building, lighted by large pointed windows. Many times as a pupil-officer had he gone in search of the shade and of quietness in one of the three solemn naves, or else, mounting the platform of the Midi tower, he had gazed upon the vast landscape bathed in sunshine. Higher still rose the steeple, which one could not climb without getting dizzy. He thought of the famous old Mutte, which on days of solemnity shook the tower with its powerful voice.

'A noble bell,' said M. Dumaine. 'When will it ring out the triumph of our arms?'

The carriage was entering Bersheim's courtyard. In a corner were stretchers; a mattress was drying. Bersheim appeared on the perron, looking aged, changed, his eyes sparkling. He stretched out his hands to Du Breuil with an air of reproach.

'My friend, was it, then, necessary to look you up?' And, without allowing him to speak: 'I know—I know . . . but your silence has very much pained someone.'

Du Breuil blushed, and still more at his mistake. Anine? No, most certainly it was not a question of her.

'I wrote you, however, and a porter took my letter to you.' Seeing that he did not understand, he said : 'You don't know, then, that D'Avol is here?'

'Here!'

The cry slipped from him as though under the incision of a lancet which pierces and alleviates. Here! D'Avol saved! D'Avol at Metz! D'Avol escaped from the Prussians! . . . D'Avol, of whom nobody had been able to give him news!

'Why, yes. On Thursday one of our doctors brought back three hundred wounded from Saint-Privat. Judge of my astonishment upon seeing D'Avol carried in. They had told me he was killed. Quick! come and embrace him!' And as Du Breuil followed him, he took him by the arm, and said confidentially : 'Don't take any notice of his bad humour; the poor fellow is a little nervous.'

As they passed through three rooms, the wounded, stretched out in very white sheets, followed them with curious eyes. Bersheim pushed open a door. Alone, in a small room, D'Avol, his shoulder swathed and bandaged, his left arm, fractured in two places, set in plaster of Paris, turned his head. His smile was contracted, hostile in its gentleness.

'Delighted to see you, Pierre! You are in good health, as far as I can see. As for me, they have settled me. I shall probably be one-armed.'

'Come, now,' said Bersheim; 'Dr. Sohier answers for your arm.'

There was a flash in D'Avol's eye. He had taken a dislike to the crusty doctor. He said to his cousin with feigned good-nature :

'So be it! so be it! as you like. . . .'

Du Breuil understood that D'Avol's pride was injured. That was the great fault of this noble soul. He showed his pride in his most insignificant acts, always being better dressed, better mounted, more elegant, than others. But why was he suffering in his pride? Such a wound did him honour. Not in the least; it humiliated him. He had a horror of being pitied. They spoke of covering his wound with iodoform. Then, he said, he would stink.

Bersheim left them together. D'Avol said :

'Very busy, eh? They have hardly seen you. In these critical moments one can only think of one's self.'

These unjust words did not affect Du Breuil. He had taken his friend's uninjured hand, and was tenderly pressing it.

Could a suffering man wound him? He had no pride in the case of those he loved. . . . His restrained emotion touched D'Avol, who knit his eyebrows, as though he feared to become tender.

'Well, my poor Pierre, here we are in a pretty mess! . . .'

'Bah!' Du Breuil affected gaiety. 'An army like ours gets over all difficulties.'

Again there was the look of irritation, this time blended with pity.

'Ah, you still have illusions? Well, I envy you. . . . In that case you are at the fountain-head of news and of decisions. You doubtless know the secret of these fine operations.'

Du Breuil cast an affectionate but serious look at him. D'Avol knew well that his irony was out of place, but, while reproaching himself for it, he took a pleasure in it.

'Come, now!' he exclaimed in a harsh voice. 'What do you call the man who left Canrobert to be crushed—the man who the day before yesterday led his troops in the mud? Explain to me, if you are able, your conference at Grimont. What did these great chiefs, these valiant warriors, say in order to remain attached to Metz?'

Du Breuil again comprehended with a look D'Avol's excitement, who jeered:

'Have pity on a poor devil who knows nothing, and who understands nothing at all!'

His hand, dry and burning, for the first time warmly, almost convulsively, pressed the friendly hand.

'My dear Pierre, you find me altered. I don't recognise myself. These reverses one after the other turn my head. We draw back; we cannonade. The Prussians must have a pretty opinion of us! . . .'

Pride—always pride—but how noble this time! Their hands were united, espoused, as though the same blood, the same pain, passed through them.

'Ah!' sighed Du Breuil. 'Who, then, understands anything about it?'

An immense lassitude took possession of him. So many sleepless nights, days of fatigue, bitter emotions. . . . He suddenly recollected the two contradictory despatches sent by Bazaine after the conference on August 26th. One was to the Minister of War: 'Still under Metz, with artillery ammunition for one battle only. Impossible, under these conditions, to force the lines of the enemy, who are behind their

intrenched positions.' The other was to MacMahon: 'Our communications are interrupted, but feebly. We can break through when we like; we await you.' And in a condition of deep dejection he saw trouble, he knew no more. . . .

D'Avol was moved by his sadness.

'Come, quietly explain this Grimont story to me, my old Pierre.'

'The Marshal,' said Du Breuil, 'unfolded the situation. Soleille traced the military and political rôle which the Army of the Rhine ought to take. In case of peace it would weigh greatly in the balance, and would safeguard the possession by France of Lorraine. Besides, he said, we have only ammunition for one battle, and he proposed to remain under Metz, disquieting the enemy by *opérations de détail*. Ladmirault and Frossard approved, the latter laying stress on the exhaustion, not to speak of the discouragement, of the army. Canrobert begged that at least they should not remain inactive. "Let us scratch everywhere and incessantly." Lebœuf vivaciously threw off the responsibility for the misfortunes of the campaign. Bourbaki expressed a wish that they would give him air, as, by making a way by Château Salins, but without ammunition, what could he do? Finally, Coffinières stated that the Place and the forts would not hold out a fortnight, and that the army ought to remain under Metz. Bazaine said, "Amen." And there you are.'

'And MacMahon in all that? What did they do about him? What! he exposes Paris . . . to come to our assistance; he lays himself open to being caught between two armies, and we don't stir?'

Bersheim, who had just re-entered the room, emphasized the remark:

'All that is very suspicious, my friend. On the 23rd Bazaine received a despatch from MacMahon. He did receive it, didn't he? Someone who knows states so.'

'Come, now,' exclaimed Du Breuil, incredulous.

'Shall I name him?' Bersheim lowered his voice. 'Colonel Charlys this morning said to a person for whom I will answer that on the 23rd—you hear?—he saw with his own eyes a despatch which the Marshal had just received from MacMahon. This despatch announced the approach of the Châlons army on the Aisne. Colonel Charlys cried out: "M. le Maréchal, we must leave immediately." And the Marshal replied: "Immediately? That is very quickly!" "I mean to say

to-morrow morning." The Marshal made the objection that there was much to be done, that at least two days were necessary. They discussed the question of baggage, and then the Marshal said to the Colonel: "Above all, do not speak to anybody about this despatch."

Du Breuil protested, so very improbable did this appear to him. Bersheim continued:

'Charlys only made the confidence this morning. This sham sortie, this comedy, had sickened him.'

Du Breuil recollected, in a flash, the movement orders prepared by Charlys; his sad air on the day of Grimont, his start when Laune informed him that Bazaine had not once during the conference made an allusion to MacMahon. He had then said in a low voice, 'If you knew!' And Laune, startled, had looked at him.

The evidence, the daylight, for a second blinded Du Breuil. He closed his eyes. Bazaine! . . . Come, it was absurd! Bazaine, receiving warning that MacMahon was coming to his assistance, and carefully hiding it from everybody, letting his colleague—or his rival—run the risk of being crushed alone! That was romance! Bersheim had misunderstood. A thing repeated over and over again got deformed. He felt himself in a hopeless chaos, in deep obscurity, and, in spite of himself, he doubted horribly.

Anine entered, carrying on a tray D'Avol's luncheon—a cutlet, cut into pieces, and some mashed potatoes, a glass of diluted wine, and some preserves. D'Avol took on again his ill look.

'You are very kind, Anine, but I am not hungry.'

There was a harshness in his voice, and one would have said that the young lady's presence humiliated, annoyed him. Silently, without appearing to notice it, she rearranged the pillows. She had hardly replied to Du Breuil's greeting. Bersheim understood that as long as they were there D'Avol would not eat.

'Let us also have luncheon. Is it ready, Anine?'

'I believe so, father.'

In her black dress, to which was pinned an apron with a bib with imitation sleeves in cambric muslin, she appeared to have grown taller.

'Good appetite!' cried D'Avol to them ironically.

They again passed into the sick-rooms. Mme. Bersheim, Grandmother Sophia, and Thibaut's wife, big with child,

were going from one bed to another, distributing the portions. Grandmother Sophia was saying to a big fellow with a sapper's beard :

'Come, I have not the courage to refuse you a little *soupe*, although M. Sohier strongly advised the diet.'

Anine pretended not to hear, so as not to have to blame. She would not allow the rules to be departed from. Her inflexible sweetness was, however, loved by all. Du Breuil was touched to see with what pleasure an old man with a gray moustache was looking at his plate.

'Going all right, Captain?' said Bersheim.

But before one bed he turned away his head. A poor voice was moaning :

'No, thanks, that's no good to me. . . . Nothing is any good to me.'

Ah ! those who died thus, without regret, without reproach, tired, too feeble. . . . Of *his* wounded, four were already dead. The first time that he had seen the sheet thrown over the face of the dead man he had sat down on the steps of the perron, weeping. His poor sons ! . . . Come, they were undoubtedly lost ! This blockade, which temporarily retarded news, was, however, terrible. Bending over the last bed, a tall young fellow in spectacles was clumsily tying a napkin round the neck of a magnificent nigger, a cymbal-player of a regiment of the line. It was Gustave Le Martrois, who, wearing the *café au lait* blouse of a Garde National, was acting as an assistant infirmary attendant.

In the dining-room, where everybody had assembled, Mme. Le Martrois and M. Dumaine, comfortably installed, were in conversation.

'General Boisjol will doubtless not come,' said Bersheim. 'Let us commence without him. The poor General doesn't get rid of his anger.'

Lisbeth and the pretty fair servant brought in the dishes—beefsteaks, fried potatoes.

'Rest easy,' said Bersheim, noticing Dumaine's wry face ; 'it is good beef.'

'Ah ! ah !' exclaimed M. Dumaine ; 'horseflesh is making its appearance at the butchers !'

'Do you want some salt?' Bersheim asked Du Breuil. 'We economize, you see !'

And he passed him the only saltcellar, which Grandmother Sophie had placed in front of her.

Mme. le Martrois lamented :

‘ When one thinks that butter costs five francs a pound !’

‘ We keep the eggs for our wounded,’ said the Grandmother.

Du Breuil inquired about the food-supplies. Bersheim, who was a friend of M. Bouchotte, the tenant of the town mills, was informed upon the subject.

‘ The authorities have announced in the Metz newspapers that we have sixty days’ provisions. Was that to inform the enemy ? Do you know the exact number of mouths to be fed ? Counting the active army, the garrison, the civil population, the wounded at the houses of the inhabitants, there are two hundred and fifty-eight thousand. That astonishes you ! The immigration from the neighbouring villages has increased the population of Metz from fifty thousand to seventy thousand mouths. . . . Certainly the granaries and the barns in the suburbs are overflowing, because the harvest was excellent this year. But who will profit by it, unless it be the Prussians ? From the top of the Plappeville fort, an officer of the Engineers was telling me—M. Barrus, you know him ?—one can see the Germans emptying the farms and the villages in the Thionville valley ; the Uhlans, pistol in hand, conduct the convoys of peasants, and force them to march. Wheat, rye, barley, oats, straw, and provender ; ah, parbleu ! they are there to be taken away. But who thinks of it ? It isn’t transports we need, for we have more than three thousand auxiliary waggons ! When I think of the crops of my farm at Noisseville, at this hour pillaged or burnt by Prussians, I get furious. . . . But there is something more. Just imagine that between HermY and Courcelles, on the railway lines, there were more than two thousand waggonloads of provisions belonging to the enemy, and large supplies at the Courcelles, Rémyilly, and HermY stations. With four engines and a sufficient number of trucks, it was easy to bring the whole lot to Metz. Eh ? That would have been a fine stroke . . . because from August 18th to the 25th there were hardly any Germans on the left bank. . . . The Marshal did not consent.’

‘ Mon Dieu !’ exclaimed Dumaine. ‘ I confess he cannot think of everything. But Coffinières ! His duty is to constitute a committee for the surveillance of supplies. Well, yes. When General de Laveaucoupet sounded him on the subject, he replied to him that he knew what he had to do.’

Gustave, in order to appear informed on the military question, said :

‘Neither has the Governor of Metz constituted the defence committee, which is ordered by the regulation on the defence of the Places. But perhaps he awaits the Marshal’s orders?’

After a hash, cooked in the oven, Lisbeth served some lentils. It was a more modest luncheon than usual at the Bersheims’. Penury was commencing to make itself felt. And Grandmother Sophia, who was pouring herself out some water, said to Du Breuil :

‘It comes from the Moselle. Those imbeciles of Germans have cut the Gorze water-conduits.’

They spoke of the courage of the members of the partisan corps, to which the brewer Hitter, an old man with a white beard, gray hat, gaiters, and fowling-piece, was attached, and who had gained popularity.

‘It is impossible that the army should not attempt to make a sortie!’ said Bersheim. He added : ‘Poor General Decaen is very bad.’

Anine’s eyes and those of Du Breuil met for the first time. The young lady’s meditative, absorbed attitude made him suffer. It seemed to him that Mme. Bersheim herself, with her admirable bright eyes, now so sad, was more reserved, colder, towards him. Doubtless they were sad, engrossed in their work of charity and devotion. The wounded took both their time and their thoughts.

‘Father Desroques is worn out with fatigue.’

After the coffee, Bersheim and Du Breuil re-entered D’Avol’s room by way of the garden. Upon seeing them, a sister wearing a large cap vanished with the luncheon tray. D’Avol had hardly touched his meal. His hand was burning. He was sombre.

‘All the same,’ he murmured, ‘it is funny to have re-entered Metz.’ And in answer to Du Breuil’s questions, he said : ‘You know that in those moments one lives as in a nightmare. I shall see that Saint-Privat ambulance as long as I live!’

He depicted it in ardent words : the house of a farmer in easy circumstances ; a lower room with dying men lying on straw ; a bedroom at the back, in which the doctors were operating, their sleeves turned up and their arms red to the armpits. The Saxons arrived with the night. There was then a blaze of fire, a tumult of pillage, raucous cries, the driving of oxen, the squealing of the pigs as they were dragged away by their ears. A house opposite finished burning, hot gusts blew a pestiferous smell, and one saw in the glow of the beams a heap

of corpses. Little by little the crowding became intolerable, and throats rattled with thirst. All this loathsome and acrid blood! this heavy reek! . . .

‘I dragged myself,’ said D’Avol, ‘into the courtyard, where a German platoon had piled arms. The soldiers, in search of wood to make *soupe*, were breaking the chairs and the cupboards. In a corner there was a large iron tank, half full of water, collected in the neighbourhood at the cost of much trouble. The infirmiry attendants dipped their soiled rags in it, and the doctors had just washed their hands and arms in it. My dear fellow! when the German cooks saw that they could not find a drop of water in the village, they filled their pots with this bloody liquid, and placed their *saucisses aux poix* in it to cook! . . .’

They shuddered, and a long silence followed.

On the evening of the next day, Du Breuil, upon returning from a mission in the camps, found Restaud more animated than usual.

‘A despatch from Thionville, sent by Colonel Turnier! Two emissaries—Marchal, Flahault! . . . Their despatches were rolled in indiarubber balls. Flahault had his in his stomach. . . .’

‘What is the news?’ asked Du Breuil eagerly.

‘Ducrot, who commands one of MacMahon’s corps, was to be at Stenay, on the left of the army, on August 27th. General Douay is at the right, on the Meuse. We must hold ourselves ready to march at the first cannon-shot.’ Restaud added: ‘The recital of these two men is touching. They were arrested, searched by the Prussians, showed out by the Mayor of Saulny, received by a curé, then by a farmer, and, by force of stratagem and energy, at last reached the outposts.’

It was a feverish night for the two officers—a night of hope for Restaud, of doubt for Du Breuil, who was harassed by Bersheim’s disclosure. . . . Would they really make a sortie? Did Bazaine wish it? Was he able? . . . Once more, in the confusion of his soul, he appealed to the discipline which closed his eyes, his ears, his mouth, which petrified him living. Who was he that he should determine and decide? Nobody. A passive instrument, he owed his labour, his intelligence, his life. His fate was to obey. This renunciation of the soldier, so much like that of the priest, might appear to him painful: it none the less admitted of beauty and of nobility. Military servitude possesses austere grandeur. Never did Du Breuil

understand it better than in these hours of anguish and of obscurity, in which, before the unknown of the future, he said to himself: '*I must not judge* the man who is the supreme and responsible chief, he to whom the fate of one hundred and sixty thousand men is intrusted. He may have—he has certainly as a guide and excuse for his conduct—reasons of which I am ignorant. A soldier like myself *ought not to reason.*' . . . He then called up Bazaine's splendid career, his brilliant actions, his impassible bravery. But a suspicious shadow weighed on his insomnia. He thought of the inexplicable return to Metz after Rezonville and Saint-Privat, of the despatch of August 23rd, of Charlys, of the day at Grimont. If, however, it were true! . . . To betray? No, but to manœuvre, to tergiversate, to obey the counsels of an interested prudence, the calculations of a secret ambition? . . . To take possession of the open country offered risks; Metz, on the contrary, was a sure basis. A conqueror, MacMahon would raise the blockade of his colleague or his rival, without the latter being exposed; conquered, what assistance would Bazaine be to him? . . . Paris would doubtless not hold out long . . . then, in case of negotiations, the enemy would have to count with the Metz army, intact, and with its chief. . . . 'Come,' he thought, 'I am wandering; I'm feverish! . . .' He thought of his father. What would the old man advise him, in the name of an honourable past, if not to push on one side all cowardly suppositions. Was he going to discuss like a Francastel, a Massoli? No; like Restaud, he must *act*. And Du Breuil, inviting a little repose, closed his eyes, his ears, and his lips, and stretched himself out in the darkness.

He awoke in a calmer frame of mind. A fresh emissary—Macherez—who arrived from Verdun in the morning, carried a ciphered despatch to headquarters. Jarras immediately conducted him to the Marshal. Du Breuil was present when they left. Jarras, delighted, was saying to an artillery Colonel:

'We have excellent news! How we are going to flog them!' And he swung his arm, as though using a whip.

The Colonel replied:

'Yes, excellent news—news which is worth an army corps!'

It was really a despatch from MacMahon. The Châlons army ought to-day—August 30th—to be twenty—perhaps fifteen—leagues from Metz! He was filled with joy. Du Breuil looked at the emissary with a kind of tender admiration. His hope and confidence had at once returned.

Orders which were given in the morning by the telegraph—which for the past two days connected the commanders of the army corps to the Ban Saint-Martin—were countermanded, then in the evening were sent again, renewing with a few modifications those of August 25th. It seemed that the day of Grimont had been the ‘dress rehearsal’ of the grand attack. It would be directed on the Sainte-Barbe by the same combined movements: the 3rd corps advancing by Noisseville on the flank of the position, the 4th corps marching in front, while the 6th corps would advance in the plain. The Sainte-Barbe position captured, the troops would turn off on to the two Bettlainville and Illange roads to reach Thionville by forced marches.

Décherac deplored that experience last time served no purpose. Far from deceiving the enemy, they were repeating exactly the same manœuvres, on the same points, and at the same hour! There was no doubt they would be on their guard this time. . . .

‘It is an undoubted fact,’ moaned stout Colonel Jacquemère, ‘that we do not know how to use our artillery. Why don’t we take all the batteries of twelve-pounders of the general reserve ahead, so as to overthrow and crush the obstacle? It is necessary to strike quickly and hard!’

Floppe pointed out that they were not taking bridge equipments. Did they count upon swimming over the Moselle? Charlys and Laune were conversing animatedly in a corner. Since Grimont, Charlys ill disguised his bitterness. At first, deceived by that flattering good nature of the Marshal, who from the beginning had employed him to Jarras’s detriment, he suddenly perceived the inefficacy of his zeal and of his efforts. Nothing had had any effect on the slippery rotundity of the Commander-in-Chief. As much on account of disappointed *amour propre* as by restless patriotism, Charlys, discontented, turned his back on him. Du Breuil caught the words: ‘It is the same despatch, the same sense as that of the 23rd!’ Laune: ‘Good! In that case he will not dare not to make a *sortie*!’ He added: ‘In my opinion—and it is the advice of Lebœuf and Bourbaki—we ought to make a way through by the south, and throw ourselves in the Vosges; we should escape by dint of speed. But the Marshal is beholden to MacMahon to leave by the north, and to advance towards Thionville and Montmédy. Only, Sainte-Barbe must be captured by main force!’

On the morning of August 31st, Du Breuil again said fare-

well to Mme. Guimbail, who blushed as she spoke to him with tears in her eyes. Du Breuil found her less dry, less yellow, almost pretty. Frisch was exulting. Cydalise was well; the fog was rising, the sun appeared. 'This time it is in earnest!' each one was thinking; eyes sparkled, and there were no more careworn foreheads. Laune himself was joking; Charlys, white gloves upon his hands, was smoking a *londres* cigar with an absorbed air, happy.

'Well, we don't set off? Half-past eleven!'

'The same as before,' said Floppe.

Ought not the 2nd and the 3rd corps, already on the left bank, to have attacked since morning? A *chasseur* of the escort, who was adjusting his stirrups, murmured:

'There is no danger of them doing that.'

Du Breuil looked at him. It was Jubault. Imperturbable, he withstood the Major's look. They were setting off.

Always delays, confusion. The 4th corps had not passed at the prescribed hour; the 6th corps and the Guard felt the consequence. Bah! the troops could deploy at their ease. Bazaine—decidedly he had time to waste—stopping on the Sainte-Barbe road, reassembled the commanders of the army corps in a road-labourer's house. He gave his instructions, and communicated to them Flahault and Mecherez's despatches.

'A fine sun to cut one's way through!' said Décherac.

Yes, an admirable day! There was a look of hope on every face. Young officers laughed. In this radiant, warm weather life was worth living.

'Garçon, a bock!' ordered Juhault. 'Boom, voilà! . . .'

What has happened? Nothing. . . . Time slips by—slips by irremediably. It is three o'clock. The commanders of the army corps have dispersed, and behind them trot Laisné, Cussac, Gex, Carrouge, Aides-de-camp, and orderly officers. What had they decided? To wait. Bazaine will give the signal—a cannon fired from the Saint-Julien fort. Then Lebœuf, under whose charge the whole movement was placed, might march.

Du Breuil, behind the Marshal in the stream of the escort, now rides over the ground occupied by the troops of the 4th corps, and advances beyond the line of sharpshooters on the road leading to Villers-l'Orme. The Marshal constructs an *epaulement* to shelter a battery. Then they return towards Grimont, where another *epaulement* is built. A battery of large-calibre cannon will bar the road, will prepare the attack,

or will assist the retreat. A company of sappers arrive, pile arms, place their knapsacks on the ground, seize shovels and pickaxes, and, under the direction of the non-commissioned officers who measure out the regular profile of the battery, the earth is piled up and the epaulement is formed.

‘Décherac!’

He dashes to the Saint-Julien fort to ask for three twenty-four pounders. An artillery Captain follows him with the teams. Du Breuil laments: ‘What are we waiting for?’ He pats Cydalise. Poor Brutus! . . . He recalls the terrible fall, the dizziness of death. . . . And thus he proceeds, knocked about with the escort, until a well-known voice—that of Décherac—calls to him.

‘My dear fellow, they pay for seats up there! What a view!’ He points out the glacis, the parapets, the heavy mass of the fort. ‘It is full of Metz inhabitants, who have come to look on. I saluted Mme. de Fontades’ (a very pretty woman, whose husband, a gentleman farmer, had taken refuge at Metz, with their two young children). ‘Sainte-Barbe is strongly fortified. We shall have our work cut out! What are we waiting for? The enemy is massing.’

Every minute, in fact, German columns were reported. They were advancing towards the Moselle, were going to cross it. What did Bazaine say? Only: ‘That’s all right! They are the troops of the left bank who arrive.’ Certain faces are contracted with disquietude. Well! is the signal for to-day or for to-morrow? Eyes turn towards the Saint-Julien fort, and that cannon which is not fired.

‘Fire!’ curses Jubault.

‘Four o’clock,’ says Décherac, looking at his watch.

And under the dusty sun, in the midst of the expectation of the carnage, four o’clock rings out from steeple to steeple. Still nothing, and minutes become like centuries.

Du Breuil hears his name called out. That is always a relief to him. A mission, however limited it may be, wholly engrosses and absorbs him; it satisfies that acute and painful necessity for action which every man feels who is lost in a subdued and paralyzed crowd. There are limits to renunciation; sometimes one suffocates. The gallop relaxes his feeling of revolt: he is no longer a thing; he is some intelligent and responsible person.

‘Go ask Marshal Lebœuf why he does not attack.’

‘And the signal?’ thinks Du Breuil. Has Bazaine, then, for-

gotten it? He gallops, and sees batteries at rest, regiments lying down, motionless cavalry, those compact masses which in a few moments will be galvanized by the great signal for the attack. He skirts the division of the 4th corps, reaches the 3rd, recognises the fanion of the Marshal, heavy and tranquil, who replies that he awaits the cannon report. At the same moment a rumbling breaks forth, a salvo is fired from the Saint-Julien fort, and then the heavy twenty-four-pounders of the battery. The great mysterious breeze passes over men and horses as over fields of corn; the cannon rend the air; the campaign guns thunder; the mitrailleuses crackle; large clouds of smoke arise; blue and red troops deploy between the veils of dust.

From that time it was to him a battle like every other, as beautiful and as lugubrious, with as much horror and more intensity, because the ardent hope of making a way through fills every heart with marvellous ardour. He rejoined his rank, saw and heard the tumult of death—that reducing itself to brief images, simple acts, a kind of mechanical life. There is a crossing in every direction of staff officers, gallops, dust, good news: the Lebœuf infantry captures Montoy, Flanville; the dragoons Coincy. A shell! General Jarras has his horse killed under him. How excited the soldiers are! All goes well. It appears that Noisseville is taken. Décherac falls; two of his ribs are broken; they take him away. Poor Décherac! he smiles all the same, very feeble, and covered with blood. Ah! there is Blache out of breath. Bravo! He learns from the impassible Marshal that they move upon Servigny. Noisseville commences to blaze. The evening falls—wounded, dead, the dew, the freshness of night. . . . In the distance one hears the bugle sounding to the charge; breathless, short, hurriedly it sounds, here fainter, there louder, in the valleys, on the plateaux:

‘ Il y a la goutte à boire
Là-haut!
Il y a la goutte à boire!’

The refrain sounds, the heart bounds. With swords on high and bayonets red, how the charge dashes forward, rushes ahead in the midst of the flourish of trumpets! Night comes, and Servigny burns. Great noises are heard above the rumbling of the fusillade and the drums.

‘Do you hear?’ asks Restaud, whose eyes sparkle.

‘Yes,’ Du Breuil hears. “‘Long live the Emperor!’”

Come, we are cutting our way through this time. To-morrow we shall be far away. . . .’

The night is dark, but on the glaciis of Saint-Julien’s brasiers burn ; here and there fires shine brightly. Decidedly it is victory.

An icy douche, a sudden sadness, falls upon the staff. Halt ! Each will camp on his own ground. Bazaine goes to the rear. Twice he passes round a wretched inn crowded with dead, and without saying a word, without leaving an order, takes the direction of the village of Saint-Julien and of Metz. Du Breuil, a choking in his throat, tries—how dark it is !—to distinguish the faces which surround him ; he recalls that voice which troubled him in the darkness of the evening at Borny. He hears it still ; it is the voice of Laune, whom he dares to question :

‘Colonel, what are we doing ? Where are we going ?’

Laune replies :

‘God only knows ! . . . Ah, what an ordeal !’

Rumours circulate around them in very low voices. Charlys has heard repeated these words, which were spoken during the day by one of Bazaine’s Aides-de-camp :

‘Yes, the Marshal is going to try to pass, but he really thinks the attempt will be unsuccessful.’

Is it possible ? Charlys murmurs :

‘Oh, it is only too certain ! We are lost ; *he* does not wish to make a sortie.’

The Marshal stops at the village of Saint-Julien. He will pass the night there. Rendezvous for the general staff for four o’clock in the morning.

No order is sent to the various corps, nor are they asked for particulars as to the day’s occurrences, and in regard to their situation. Uncertainty hovers above them ; a few illusions are retained. Restaud’s conviction alone upholds Du Breuil, who is shaken, who has again fallen into the depths of doubt and of anguish. They still speak to impose upon themselves and kill insomnia. It appears that it was old Changarnier, as white as a sheet, so weak that he has to be assisted on to and from his horse, who told Lebœuf to sound the charge. ‘Come, that I may once more hear my old African refrain.’ And to a Major he said : ‘Show that you are possessed of nerve.’ They speak of him with respect, smiling the while. This little old man, so polite, so discreet, so brave, inspires keen sympathy. . . . What else is there ? Lebœuf and Frossard are at

loggerheads. The Fauvart-Bastoul division, separated from the 2nd corps, and placed under the orders of Lebœuf, continued obeying Frossard. Bazaine has not intervened. All the same, Sainte-Barbe, the key of the position, is not captured. Will they take it to-morrow? . . . Two hours' rest in an icy-cold room, stretched upon a mattress in one's clothes, and then the pale dawn appears, drowned in fog.

A bad piece of news: the Prussians have retaken Servigny early this morning, and are fortified there. But what is happening? General Jarras, summoned to the Marshal, returns thence, and confidentially dictates an order to four Colonels of the staff, who urgently take it to the commanders of the army corps. In addition, the Marshal has read to Jarras two despatches prepared for the Emperor—one in view of success, the other in view of a check, expressing the necessity for remaining under Metz. Strange foresight, thinks Du Breuil. However, the order carried by the four Colonels is not kept so secret that one does not know the sense of it. . . . 'Nothing is changed in the programme of the previous day, the object still being to occupy Sainte-Barbe and march on Bettlainville.' But the bearers of the order to the commanders of the army corps must confidentially inform them, on the Marshal's behalf, that, if they encounter too great a resistance, they must remain as long as possible in their positions, so as to withdraw in the evening, in good order, under the protection of the forts. When Charlys copied the order, he said to Jarras: 'But it is impossible! This is an order to retreat. The commanders of the corps will not be deceived by it.'

The cannonade had recommenced in the midst of the fog. Estafettes and Aides-de-camp followed one another. The Prussians, who had received reinforcements during the night, little by little gained the upper hand. The 4th corps received the order to remain on the defensive until the 3rd corps had recaptured Servigny. The Prussians gained ground, and retook Flanville and Coincy. The Fauvart-Bastoul division, owing to lack of artillery, had to fall back. Lebœuf, who was compromised, could hold his ground no longer. Du Breuil had been sent to the Guard, the cavalry division of which was drawing up, with the Forton division, to execute a gigantic charge on the open ground before Servigny; but Francastel rejoined him there, carrying the order to the two cavalry divisions to withdraw.

'Our right is in retreat,' he said. 'The 3rd corps is retiring. Blache has just taken a note from Lebœuf to the Marshal. . . .

The whole army returns under Metz.' He added, 'Blache is extraordinary! furious! He is holding his right fist stretched out in an attitude of malediction. Look, like this!' (He imitated the gesture.) 'He received a bullet in his elbow, and is unable to unbend his arm. He appears to be threatening everybody. . . . And you think that prevented him from remaining on horseback? He is made of iron. He set off again as he came, without wishing them to dress his wound.'

Du Breuil galloped in silence beset by the vision of Blache, with outstretched fist, cursing the retreat. He was unable to rejoin Bazaine. The Marshal, followed by his private staff, had returned to Metz for luncheon. At ten minutes to one o'clock—Du Breuil looked at his watch—he was passing with the whole of the general staff, headed by Jarras, over the Sainte-Barbe road, returning to the Ban Saint-Martin. Décherac wounded, Restaud absent, he felt abominably alone.

He was horrified by Floppe's jeering remarks and Massoli's satisfied look. He drew near to Charlys, who was saying to Colonel Jacquemère:

'Assuredly the Sphinx has fastened us all together.'

A regiment, still quivering, which they met, opened to allow them to pass. As upon the occasion of the return from Grimont, but with more rancour and sarcasm, the soldiers put them out of countenance. The officer's eyes, seeking theirs, said with painful astonishment:

'We shall never have such a chance again. Why are we returning? We do not want, then, to get out?'

Du Breuil felt a silent reproof weighing upon his comrades and himself. Wounded men on the roadside also looked at them with hatred in their eyes. They stretched out in interminable files with their heads bandaged up, their arms set in splints, their rough shirts stained with blood. Several of them were waiting, motionless, upon crutches until the general staff had passed away. Du Breuil cast his eyes to the ground. Jubault, in the meantime, was murmuring:

'Much good there is in smashing your head!'

CHAPTER III.

FOR three days, the day after Noisseville, gangs of men had buried the dead, buried the bodies of horses under lime, covered up refuse of all kinds with the soil taken from the canals which

had been hollowed out to drain off the rain. The Metz district displayed its heap of ruins, its desert of cultivated land; the muddy Moselle flowed into the trenches for the defence of the bastions; the Seille looked as broad as a small arm of the sea. One could only see the bare earth, the water which was agitated at the hour troops of thin horses went down to it, the bare sky across which rain-clouds were scudding. In the ambulances and hospitals, already full in the town, crowded the three thousand five hundred men who had been wounded in the last fight. Public buildings, like private houses, gave forth the perpetual odour of death. Everywhere were beds, stretchers, straw, and upon these sick-beds of misery poor, motionless, or gesticulating forms, hollow and yellow faces, acute, savage, and stupefied eyes. Death-rattles arose near wounded in a state of coma, the forerunner of the great sleep; the piercing screams of those who were under the knife issued from the walls; putrid expirations made one think of flesh eaten up by gangrene.

Infirmiry attendants and Sisters of Mercy had an air of haggard insomnia; the jaded doctors were sad, as though satiated with the butchery, under the large tents on the Esplanade. In the waggons on the Place Royale hundreds of penned-up unfortunates were suffering, and at all hours the women of Metz came to bend over their bed-heads. Pale hands veined with blue, as well as red fingers pricked by needles, tented wounds with lint, wrapped them round and bound them tight with bandages. Nothing disheartened their agile courage. No wound nor pain was regarded with indifference by these charitable hearts; they were possessed of a consoling devotion, an inexhaustible pity for all. Du Breuil experienced a nameless feeling of distress, a sickening disgust; he felt he knew not what cowardly desire to hang his sabre on a nail, and, closing the curtains, to loll upon his bed, his head buried in the pillow, to sleep like a brute, to think no more, to cease to be.

It was Restaud who saved him. Such a state of prostration was dangerous. According to Restaud, one ought not—indeed, it was impossible—to try to seek refuge in oblivion from the horror of the present situation, but, on the contrary, to imbue one's mind with it as with a venom which burns, irritates, and sustains. To abandon one's self was to wish to lose one's self. He himself was resisting, was bracing up his will and his muscles, unshakable in his faith that a sortie would be made

all the same, or that relief would come from outside. A stubborn Breton, he did not doubt, did not wish to doubt, on the subject of the safety of Metz and the fate of France. His obstinacy reacted on Du Breuil. So many men around them were discouraged. Many gave themselves up to the blackest pessimism, welcoming every piece of false news. Characters altered. Massoli, deprived of milk and vegetables, showed a face covered with eczema, and complained from morn until night. Floppe, whose liver was out of order, became insupportable. Laune could not suffer him. Floppe took his revenge by biting remarks and caricatures. Francastel was tiring of his talkative vanity.

‘And all that is caused,’ said the chief medical officer, Riscard, to him, ‘because your stomach needs salt.’ He added, ‘You will see many more of them;’ and he went on to express fanciful theories on the subject of exclusive alimentation on horseflesh.

One could not tell whether this eccentric old fellow, with his ruddy punchinello face, the large wart on his eye, the white hair of his eyebrows and his moustache, was speaking seriously or making fun of everybody.

Every time that Restaud had a moment’s freedom, he sought Du Breuil’s company. A deep friendship, one without phrases, was slowly forming between them. They never discussed. Sometimes they did not even attempt to speak; silence is a communion. On certain evenings Restaud, ordinarily very laconic, commented upon the day’s events, trying to find a ray of hope in them. Optimism was, however, difficult. There was talk of MacMahon having received a check near Stenay. Since the return of the troops to their former cantonments—the 2nd and 3rd corps on the right bank of the Moselle, to the south and east of Metz; the 4th and 6th corps on the left bank, to the west and to the north; the infantry of the Guard at the Ban Saint-Martin and at Plappeville; the cavalry of the Guard and the reserve cavalry at Chambière—headquarters, reduced to the work connected with the information and parley department, was unoccupied. Du Breuil took advantage of the daily correspondence to ride over the bivouacs in search of a comrade like Védel, or of a cordial relative like Lieutenant-Colonel de la Manse, who was camped with the 2nd Chasseurs d’Afrique on the glacis of the ramparts to the north of Metz. He had seen D’Avol again, and the memory of his last visit remained to him painful. D’Avol had been unreasonably annoying, aggressive, for him even hard, in the presence of Anine. . . . Was that the reason why he had not returned?

He reproached himself for it, and had Cydalise saddled. Ought he not to also visit Décherac, Judin, Blache, Poterin?

On a Saturday, three days before, he had come to Metz to attend the funeral of General Decaen. The brave soldier had died in consequence of his wounds, also, it was said, of sorrow. Lieutenant-Colonel Poterin was under treatment at the École d'Application. . . . Metz, the Pont des Morts, the Rue Saint-Arnould, the low windows through which one saw wounded men! He loved the old buildings of the school, the remains of a Dominican abbey—the cloister, the abbatial residence, the library where so many times he had lingered. How the wounded had encroached upon the rooms, at the bottom of one of which, a small one, the Lieutenant-Colonel's tumefied face stood out in relief. His hands clasped on the bedclothes, Poterin seemed to sleep, but his eyes were wide open. A whistling sound escaped from his pierced breast. At first, thanks to his robust constitution, they had hoped to save him; but for the past two days, murmured the infirmary attendant, he only lived by a miracle.

'Colonel!' murmured Du Breuil.

Poterin appeared not to hear. He was looking straight before him, as one looks with anguish at an unscalable wall or at an abyss.

The infirmary attendant whispered:

'He has called for his wife and his children the whole night.'

Du Breuil recollected. Poterin had once spoken of his people—father, mother, wife, three little girls, and no fortune. The fate of this brave man who was dying there, far from those he loved, oppressed his heart. He turned his head, and saw in a neighbouring bed a face, quite white, quite young, bound up in bloody linen, which seemed, in its distress of solitude and abandonment, to implore him. A black artilleryman's coat with the galloons of a quartermaster was hanging above the bed. Du Breuil approached. His name? Louis Chartrain. The son of the State Counsellor? . . . He saw once more the stout, honest man with a red tie, who, at Saint-Cloud, was talking with Mme. Langlade, and trembling for his son. . . . The wounded man, abashed, thanked him, blushed. Tears came into his eyes when Du Breuil said:

'Your father appeared to love you very much.'

'Ah yes, Major! Poor father!'

Where had he got his wound? At Rezonville. A Bredow cuirassier had split his forehead with a sabre blow. . . .

The dying Poterin, with a mechanical movement, was rubbing two of his fingers on the bedclothes, one against the other, as if he were trimming, still trimming an imaginary pencil. He was still looking fixedly before him without seeing.

Du Breuil held out his hand to young Chartrain.

‘Be of good courage!’

What obscure providence had until then preserved this poor young fellow from death? Was it the tenderness of his parents which accompanied him from afar and protected him? . . . He thought of the Langlades, so indifferent, so superb, and the little second-lieutenant who was rotting in the ground.

Now to the school of Saint-Clément! . . . Blache was nursed there in the dormitory reserved for officers. A priest, dressed in an apron and occupied in humble tasks, advanced. He recognised Father Desroques, very thin and burning with fever. He smiled. Major Blache a bullet in his elbow? Certainly, they had extracted it for him with great difficulty. He had supported the operation without a grimace, without a sigh.

‘See, he is down there, looking at you!’

Du Breuil approached quickly, followed by the looks of the wounded who were strong enough to still retain curiosity. Blache was carrying his arm in splints.

‘Very kind of you, my dear fellow. . . .’

And immediately—eager for news—he questioned, growled, and accused. The Marshal—*Père l’as-tu vu*, as the soldiers called him—had left Lebœuf to be crushed. He praised the courage of his chief, who had offered up his life. Around him the staff had been decimated, and General Manèque had been killed. And if such sacrifices served no purpose! . . .

‘Where are we going?’ he concluded.

It was evident that Bazaine did not wish to make a sortie. Then! . . .

Du Breuil could tell him nothing which was consoling. Already they were commencing to give out rations. There was no more hay for the horses, which they were beginning to slaughter. The last oxen and sheep were eaten. They had commenced to consume horseflesh.

He shortened his visit. When leaving he saw a doctor of the International, humpbacked, hairy, grimacing—the gorilla of Borny—leaning over a bed. With his long finger-nails he was manipulating a bistoury, working in the flesh of a great, stretched-out body, the arms of which were held and the face of which was concealed by a Jesuit father.

‘Major Couchorte,’ said Father Desroques, who saw Du Breuil out.

Now for Décherac!

Brought back to Metz after being wounded, Décherac had had the good fortune to be met by M. and Mme. de Fontades near the Porte des Allemands. They had recognised him, taken him with them, and by main force installed him in the rather small apartment which they occupied for want of a better at Metz. There was a smell of new-mown hay, a cheerful voice, and two charming eyes.

Mme. de Fontades exclaimed:

‘Major Du Breuil! Certainly. . . . M. Décherac often speaks of you. Come forward, please.’

There was a dark passage, a small bedroom. Décherac, still pale, was sitting in a large armchair, smiling. How could he help smiling, nursed by so amiable a woman, cares and attentions heaped upon him?

‘Oh! my wound is not dangerous. Three weeks’ rest!’

He inquired of his comrades and work.

‘Nothing important,’ said Du Breuil, with a sigh.

Décherac’s gaiety disappointed him; he felt sad and alone. Was it the light *frou-frou* of Mme. de Fontade’s dress, her blue eyes, the odour of new-mown hay? A tender feeling of indolence came into his heart. How far away was Mme. de Guëonic, veiled in a haze of oblivion! Anine. . . . She appeared to him still further away, inaccessible. She had hardly looked at him the other time. . . . Décherac, however, wished to know if they were attempting anything. Nothing! Bazaine had distinctly said, when leaving the Saint-Julien heights to re-enter this eternal Ban Saint-Martin:

‘Well! Since it is thus, we shall now fight every day!’

Since then, the Marshal had ordered Canrobert to capture Ladonchamps should an occasion offer, and Frossard, Mercy-le-Haut. Lebcœuf was to support them, come to an arrangement with them.

‘I know that,’ said Décherac, ‘a dubitative order!’

But that very day, finding that they had delayed too late, Bazaine renounced the attack. They seemed to resign themselves to the blockade; the roads were intersected and barricaded; sheltered trenches were opened at several points; continued lines protected the front lines of the camps and connected the forts, the armament of which was being pushed forward.

Décherac listened with polite attention. Du Breuil had noticed this fact, that often a wound disinterests an officer: his campaign is over; he enjoys a well-earned repose. Décherac's indifference conformed, in short, to his smiling egoism.

It was Judin's turn. . . . He was nursed in the neighbouring street on the ground-floor of the house of Mdle. Élise Sorbet, a poor and ugly old maid with a large nose, a large forehead under gray ringlets, a touching mixture of ridiculousness and kindness. Her cramped apartment could only hold one wounded man. She had chosen Judin, who appeared to be well brought up. A motherly feeling had made her attached to him. She petted him—the poor young man whose right arm was amputated! Before the house—geraniums flowered in the window—Du Breuil saw Védél. Fatigue and suffering became him well. Tanned, grown thin, hardened, he had a brave and unconstrained air. In the condition of solitude from which Du Breuil was suffering, the sight of his cousin gave him pleasure. For the first time he greeted him by his Christian name, which he found comical.

‘Good-afternoon, Casimir.’

‘Good-afternoon, Pierre. You have come to see your friend? I also. I have come from the Esplanade and the Polygone. I’ve soldiers almost everywhere.’

Behind them the door was open. Out of patience at hearing them conversing, the old maid said with ceremonious grace:

‘Will you take the trouble, gentlemen, to come in?’

There was an odour as of a damp cellar in the small drawing-room with its well-waxed floor, its rounds of tapestry before the chairs, its artificial flowers on the mantelpiece, and its pious images upon the walls.

‘You have come for news of the Vicomte?’

She pronounced this word with veritable pleasure. This rich, titled young man, who had enlisted without anything obliging him to do so, seemed to her to be a hero. And now he would remain mutilated, maimed like a common workman! Lowering her voice, she said:

‘He has no appetite. You must urge him, gentlemen, to eat. Yet I prepared him a good tapioca broth and two fresh eggs.’

Védél looked at Du Breuil in admiration. Fresh eggs were seventy-five centimes each!

‘I fear,’ she added, ‘that he doesn’t exercise sufficient will power. The tenants on the first-floor have lost their wounded.’

And conducting them by a miniature garden, where there was just room enough for a rose-tree and a canary in a cage, she pushed open the glass door of a small whitewashed room.

‘Some friends, Monsieur Maxime.’

Vicomte Judin raised an emaciated face. His too short right arm ended in a pad of linen, and gave a sad impression; his left hand, quite white, seemed delicate, as though embarrassed, constrained at being alone. It seemed to shake the hands of Du Breuil and Védél awkwardly. Mdlle. Sorbet had discreetly disappeared. A fugitive colour above his cheek-bones, Judin smiled—a poor smile.

‘Well, what news?’ he said. ‘They told me that yesterday smoke was seen in the direction of Briey, and that cannon was heard. Was it that of MacMahon? They also told me that a great movement had occurred in the Prussian camps, that they have seen troops pass from the left to the right bank. A Lieutenant who came to see me this morning—Marquis, of the Voltigeurs of the Guard—was talking of the intervention of Austria. Bismarck and the King of Prussia will be sent back precipitately to Berlin. . . .’

Marquis! Du Breuil smiled sceptically. He said:

‘Far from that, it is rumoured that Marshal de MacMahon, weakened or even beaten, has had to retreat towards the north.’

Judin murmured:

‘This ignorance is exasperating. . . . Why don’t they try to procure information?’

They had in vain suggested to the Marshal the ascension of a manned balloon, and to Coffinières the immersion of a telegraphic cable which would connect them with Thionville. As to the floating bladders thrown on to the Moselle, the despatch-balloons sent up by a chemist of the army, they had had no news of them.

Judin felt he was still very weak . . . this rain, which was spinning out the miasmata, made the air unbreathable. Every now and then fetid smells came down from the upper story, where, Judin said, a Zouave, surviving the two wounded soldiers who died on the previous day, was decomposing alive, eaten up by a terrible gangrene. He looked broken-heartedly at his stump.

‘What will they say at the club? Not very convenient for holding the cards!’

He smiled, but at the bottom of his smile what bitterness

there was ! It was the business of poor devils of soldiers and officers to get themselves maimed, while he. . . .

When Védél and Du Breuil had left him, Mdlle. Sorbet, beseeching and embarrassed, detained them.

‘Gentlemen, will you do me the pleasure of accepting one of my *prunes à l’eau-de-vie* ? I make them myself. They say I am successful.’ They were obliged to taste her fine large plums, sweet and strong. ‘This poor child is very sad,’ she said. ‘He ought to get up, go out for a walk. . . . But it is always raining ! . . .’

The horrible stench descended, and entered the room. Védél very quickly swallowed the contents of the bottom of his glass. Outside he said :

‘Upon my application the Colonel has proposed Judin for the cross. But the Marshal is in no very great hurry to occupy himself with the troops. He has not yet visited an ambulance.’

‘We are sold !’ cried a voice, so guttural and so raucous that he started.

Du Breuil also turned round. Attached by one leg to its perch on the sill of a window, an enormous green parrot, its horny eyelids half open and its beak inclined, was looking at them sardonically. Du Breuil, pricked to the heart, recalled the Forbach rout, the great flapping of the wings of the green bird which was sobbing in the night : ‘To Berlin ! to Berlin !’

He shrugged his shoulders and passed on. Védél, indignant, jeered :

‘Is he not stupid with his air of a stuffed bird ! Sold ! He repeats the catchword of simpletons and cowards. Sold ! . . .’ And showing his fist, he cried : ‘Shut your beak, imbecile !’

For three days the weather was wretched, a deluge inundating the bivouacs, the waters of the Moselle rising higher than they had ever done before, a black sky, a penetrating cold—such were the auspices of that never-to-be-forgotten Wednesday, the 7th, upon which the Sedan catastrophe, foreseen since the 4th—Major Samuel, sent to parley, had learnt it from the enemy—struck Metz and the army a stunning blow.

Two German newspapers, seized upon prisoners, reached the Marshal in the morning. Eighty thousand men had capitulated ; MacMahon was dead ; the Emperor was a prisoner. . . . There was the explanation of those inexplicable movements of the enemy—columns defiling from the left bank on to the

right—they were simply prisoners of the Châlons army, and those sounds of music, those cries of the night before last, victorious cheers. . . . Major Samuel, again sent to parley, returned with the confirmation of the disaster. . . . The Corps Législatif had been invaded by the crowd; the ministry had dissolved itself; the Empress had fled to England; the Prince Imperial had retired into Belgium. The Republic was proclaimed. Paris remained calm. Here is what was repeated, exaggerated, deformed, in the midst of the incredulity of some, the blind acceptance of others, the stupor of all: Thiers, Minister; the Paris deputies meeting to constitute the government of the National Defence; Trochu, President.

Before evening, six hundred French prisoners, which the enemy owed to us in exchange for German prisoners, arrived, and recounted what they knew—some more and others less, according to the hour at which they had been captured. All were in accord on the main points. MacMahon's army, composed of four corps (the 1st Ducrot, the 5th De Failly, the 7th Douay, the 12th Le Brun), had left Châlons on August 21st to march on Reims. It had gone northwards by Rethel, Chêne-Populeux, and Beaumont, where Failly, on the 30th, had been beaten. Pressed by the enemy, it had had on September 1st to renounce the march upon Metz by Stenay, and had established itself at the bottom of Givonne, to the right of Sedan. Until noon the action had been favourable to us; then, the enemy having crushed our left, they had retreated on Mézières in the greatest disorder. The six hundred prisoners belonging to the left wing, which was cut off and surrounded, knew nothing more. They had carefully informed them *en route* of the captivity of the Emperor, and the capitulation of MacMahon. But that was doubtless, they said, a demoralizing rumour spread about by the enemy. Du Breuil hoped so; Restaud was sure of it.

Marquis came for news. The officers of the various staffs accompanying the commanders of the army corps—Gex, Cussac, Carrouge—all in a state of feverish anxiety, listened to the remarks of one of the Marshal's officers. A few Turcos, questioned by Bazaine, had just stated that the 1st and the 7th had been annihilated, the Emperor being present. But certain affirmations were confused, others contradictory. Bersheim, hastening from Metz, informed Du Breuil of the effervescence in the town, where the strangest stories were circulated. Marquis corroborated the fact, and embellished with assurance:

MacMahon had dismissed De Failly, Douay was ravaging the Palatinate, Austria had declared war on Prussia, Italy had sent a hundred thousand men into the Tyrol. . . .

Bersheim asked :

‘Is it true that the Prussians, to impress us the more, purposely chose its prisoners from all the regiments?’

An officer affirmed it. Then Bersheim, very pale and tears in his eyes, asked if there were any Zouaves and Cuirassiers. Du Breuil comprehended his hope: his sons were perhaps in the band, or perhaps a comrade would be.

That evening, before going to bed, he tore off the sheet of the calendar on the wall; the ephemerides bore the mention: ‘*Prise de Malakoff*. . . .’ The next day he found the opal ring in a box which he opened by accident. He had not worn it since the day the blood of poor Vacossart had stained it. He polished it, and having mechanically slipped it upon his finger, upon which the milky stone sparkled with pink and green reflections, he let it remain. . . . If this deplorable news were true, what would become of Mme. de Guïonic? Doubtless she had retired to Brittany—was allowing the storm to pass. At once she appeared to him a thousand leagues away; he pitied her like a forgotten person, like one who is dead—felt how much she had paled in his memory, an obscure, uncertain image. Recent defeats, the nightmare of the blockade, the Empire fallen, crushed his imagination: all that seemed improbable to him. He was stunned by it; his soul was sick.

‘Frisch, my cloak!’

Rain, flooded bivouacs, benumbed men under the tents surrounded by little lakes, fever, dysentery. . . . He would call upon D’Avol! His heart, in the apprehension of suffering, was oppressed. . . . Near the Porte de France he met two known figures, those of a man and a horse—Saint-Paul astride Musette. The Saint-Cloud veteran had one foot bound up and without a boot.

‘Are you wounded, quartermaster?’

He smiled disdainfully. A piece of flesh had been carried away by a fragment of a shell on the morning of September 1st, as he was making a reconnaissance. It was not worth talking about. Musette, so badly nourished, was more to be pitied. He was walking her out to distract her. And then she sometimes cropped a little green, or got a handful of corn. He did not say that he was marauding for her.

'Are you being treated at the ambulance?' said Du Breuil, looking at him kindly.

Saint-Paul saddened. No, he had nothing to do with doctors. Their knives had been inserted into too much rotten flesh; he had no wish that they should poison him. He was dressing his wound with his ration of brandy.

Du Breuil made a friendly motion with his head; the veteran saluted, his sunburnt complexion having turned to a ruddy brown. Both of them thought of Lacoste.

When he entered the courtyard of the Bersheims, Thibaut's wife, her eyes swollen, was calling to her husband. Her approaching maternity deformed her face and her figure. Her children—they looked ill, and the little girl had quite changed—pressed against her petticoat. Thibaut was in course of filling with bucketsful of water a row of barrels and tubs. An order from Coffinières had prescribed this measure in the case of each house, in view of a bombardment which was announced as imminent. The lame man came up, and took Cydalise into the stable. Bersheim appeared and looked sadly at Louise, who fled in tears.

'Poor Louise!' said Bersheim. 'She is crying for her father and mother.'

The old Larouys, his tenants at Noisseville, had remained like two faithful dogs to guard the house and lands. They had been killed by the same shell, one at the side of the other, on the evening of August 31st. A wounded Metz corporal, who was actually being nursed by the Bersheims, and who knew the Larouys well, had certified their death. The barn had caught fire, and the farm was destroyed.

'How is D'Avol progressing?'

'In spite of Dr. Sohier's orders, he wished to get up. There was a stormy scene between them this morning. Between you and me, Jacques' irascibility surprises me. I have never seen him thus.'

'Suffering?' said Du Breuil.

'But my other wounded suffer,' retorted Bersheim, 'and they are not so difficult to manage.' He looked at Du Breuil. 'My wife is very ill. Since the arrival of the Sedan prisoners, she has taken no further interest in life. They have shut them up in the station buildings, awaiting their reincorporation. . . .'

Du Breuil sympathized in silence with his disappointed hope. Bersheim sadly shook his head, and continued:

‘It appears they are about to hand over others to us at the present time. . . . What is it you want, friend?’

He turned towards an unknown man dressed in gray cloth trousers and a gallooned Zouave coat, who had just staggered into the courtyard. Suddenly—what is the matter with Bersheim? He wildly rolled his eyes, uttered a piercing cry, and opened his arms.

‘Maurice, my child, is that you?’

And they clasped each other in their arms, sobbing.

‘How is it you are here? Is it really you? How pale you are! Ah, how happy your mother will be! . . . And your . . . brother, and . . . André?’

He was answered by a silence. The unfortunate fellow—what was his age? Who would think he was twenty-five?—the lamentable prisoner, feverish, shivering, with his hollow, wrinkled face, his inflamed eyes, murmured:

‘Oh, father! father!’

‘You do not reply to me,’ groaned Bersheim. ‘André is dead, is he not?’

Still the terrible silence. Bersheim let fall his arms, an infinite sorrow making him pale. All his blood flowed back to his heart.

‘My God!’ he murmured in a sob, and, seizing the son who remained to him by the shoulders, he despairingly embraced him; then, stepping away from him, and again clasping him closely in his arms, he said: ‘My child, how thin you are! how you must have suffered! Come, come! . . .’

He led him away, soaked with water, covered with mud, losing one of his broken shoes. Du Breuil then saw Anine rush from the perron. Without doubt she guessed.

‘Father, do you want to kill mother? Hide Maurice!’

She threw herself into her brother’s arms, but the poor fellow, ashamed of himself, repulsed her, murmuring in an indistinct voice:

‘Do not approach me.’

She understood that it was because of his filthiness. With a fine shrug of her shoulders, she drew him towards the laundry, saying:

‘You must be dying from hunger. Wait; I’ll bring you some broth and some eggs. . . .’

She spoke not of death, but, great God! what must she not have felt under her calm? Bersheim took Du Breuil, who wished to withdraw, by the hands.

‘Oh, friend, remain! Do not abandon us when a little happiness comes to us. . . . Happiness so bitterly mingled! Poor André! Ah, what misery! In what a state Maurice returns to us! . . .’

And at the same time, his eyes falling upon his sleeve, he rid himself of the vermin with a fillip. By means of a bath and decent clothes to replace his rags, a man with a human face succeeded the ragged individual of a short time before. And while awaiting Father Desroques, for whom someone had gone in search—he alone, with his ardent piety, could prepare Mme. Bersheim—Maurice spoke, spoke as in a fever, with a voice which had become young, the voice of a child who has returned to the fold. Bersheim drank in his words; Anine, grave, appeared and disappeared; while Du Breuil, his heart wrung with pity, listened to the bubbling and the flowing, in the young sergeant-major’s narrative, of an inexhaustible stream of miseries.

The disbanding at Woerth, the flow upon Saverne, the re-organization at Châlons, then the slow flowing back of the army in disorder, dying of hunger, pillaging, intoxicating itself, as far as that funnel, that abyss—Sedan! . . . The desperate struggle—the 1st Zouaves fought well!—the crushing defeat, the horrible rout, the agglomeration of all the débris of the regiments in the Place, and, finally, the capitulation! He said the Emperor was going to give up his sword, spoke of the frightful misery of the soldiers dying with hunger on the Presqu’île d’Iges, and of the evacuation of the successive columns of prisoners on the 3rd. . . . Since then he had hardly eaten; always on the march, urged forward by blows from the butt-end of rifles. Those who fell were shot. *En route* they had learnt of the captivity of the Emperor. The war would not last; Strasburg was about to surrender; Paris could not hold out. Metz would be bombarded that same evening.

A dark shadow rose up before the door. It was Father Desroques. He took Maurice’s hands, held them clasped for a long time, deep pity making his lips tremble, a sorrowful faith shining in his eyes. After a few minutes’ conversation he sighed:

‘I shall, then, be the messenger of God!’

Anine led Maurice away, telling him to make no noise. Bersheim followed them. Du Breuil, who knew the house, went into D’Avol’s room. He did not find him there, but

saw him at the bottom of the garden, stretched upon a couch, across which stretchers were laid. His features were contracted, his air was hard. D'Avol pretended not to see him advance; did not turn his eyes until the gravel crunched under Du Breuil's boots.

'Hallo! Pierre, is that you?'

'Do you know the news?'

'Yes, Maurice. . . . Lisbeth came to recount that to me. The poor devil's not very brilliant, eh? His brother has paid his debt. I prefer not to be present at this family scene.'

This dry tone, this ironical voice!—how they had changed his Jacques! But D'Avol continued:

'You are looking at my arm? Sohier is an ass. Bah! I shall be sufficiently cured for the capitulation.'

'What do you say?' cried Du Breuil.

'I say, for the capitulation. Because it's that, isn't it, gentlemen of chief head-quarters, officers of Bazaine, which you are preparing for us? This time I don't ask you to explain to me the Noisseville sortie. Eh? That would embarrass you?'

Du Breuil looked at him. Such a tone! D'Avol was mad! . . . He was going to reply, when he heard a slight rustling. Anine was behind them. Her face was radiant, but her eyes were full of tears.

'Mother gave a great cry, then she called for Maurice, and they are now crying together. Come, rejoice with us.'

Although D'Avol had distinctly seen Gustave and Thibaut, who drew near to carry him upon his couch, he said, in a jeering voice:

'It's all very well for Pierre. You forget that I am powerless!'

What had come over him? Anine's only reply was to smile with a sort of compassion, the dignity of which struck Du Breuil. Behind the wounded man he said, in a very low voice:

'What is the matter with D'Avol?'

She remained silent. Then he gently murmured:

'I participate in your joy.'

After the lapse of a moment she said:

'Maurice has recounted the death of André. The Morsbronn Cuirassiers fell like heroes. . . .'

He thought of Lacoste, and said:

'Yes, it is splendid to die in that way!'

In the drawing-room, among the affected group which united Maurice and his mother, Bersheim at one side, Grandmother Sophia at the other, Father Desroques a little on one side, Du Breuil sought the beautiful eyes of Mme. Bersheim. She was transfigured. A sorrowful mother, she bent her head upon her son's shoulder, and, with sweet and silent tears, opened her heart. Du Breuil respectfully kissed the hand which she held out to him. He turned towards D'Avol, whom they were carrying :

'Your cousin Jacques,' said Grandmother Sophia.

Maurice rose to embrace D'Avol, who submitted to it, pale, fire in his look.

'My poor fellow !' he said. 'You bring us pitiful news. Things don't go very much better here.'

Hard expressions, which were followed by a feeling of uneasiness. . . . With his shaven head, his wan cheeks, Maurice had, indeed, the appearance of a poor fellow, a sad child. Seized with bashfulness and shame, humiliated by this tone, this air of reproach, he lowered his eyes. Was it his fault if he had been conquered and made prisoner ?

'Then you have capitulated ?' asked D'Avol. 'A whole army ? I hope you were, at all events, beaten ?'

But Anine interposed :

'To-morrow, later. . . .'

Again D'Avol's mouth contracted. Du Breuil was astonished at so bitter a patriotism, at so much harshness, so much injustice. . . .

Upon returning to the Ban Saint-Martin in the midst of a torrential rain, he heard the sound of a violent cannonade. Night was about to fall. Flashes of lightning intercalated the detonations. What was the meaning of this infernal uproar ? The bombardment thundered forth until nine o'clock, and then ceased ; the rain stopped, and a strong wind carried away the smoke. And that was all. Du Breuil heard in the morning that their losses were insignificant. They were lost in conjectures upon the subject of this noisy demonstration.

On that day they commenced to distribute corn to the horses. Coffinières was ordered to call into the town all the existing provender. A rumbling was heard in the direction of Verdun, said some ; of Toul, in the opinion of others. Through the mouth of a wounded soldier, who had escaped from Ars, and who had seen a bill which had been brought from Nancy, they learnt that Paris, Lyons, Marseilles, Bor-

deaux, and Rochefort had proclaimed the Republic. One of the Sarrebrück prisoners, who had been exchanged, gave precise details: Le Flô was Minister of War; the Emperor was undergoing his captivity at Cassal; the Prince Imperial was in London. There was no mention of the Empress. Jules Favre, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, had written to the King of Prussia to remind him of his own declaration: 'War was directed not against France, but against the Emperor; the time had come to prove his sincerity, and to make peace.' But how could one delude one's self by such a hope?

On the following day, Major Samuel, summoned to the out-posts, read the confirmation of the fatal news in the *Gazette de la Croix*. A Prussian officer stated, upon his honour, to the officer sent to parley, that the Prince Royal was to enter Paris that very day. On the 12th, the Marshal convoked the commanders of the corps and the generals of divisions to his headquarters: in the presence of the Sedan disaster they must renounce important engagements, content themselves so as to keep the troops on the alert, with small *opérations de détail*, the initiative of which the commanders of the corps would have to take; they would thus await the orders of the Government. He charged the general officers to communicate what they had just heard to the troops. On the same day M. Debains, an Embassy secretary, who had been attached to the general staff since the opening of the war, asked Bazaine for authorization to cross the Prussian lines. Captured and brought back to Metz the same evening, he addressed to the Marshal a confidential report of a conversation which he had had with some Prussian officers. A *résumé* was as follows: There were six hundred thousand Germans in France; the country was in no way enthusiastic for war; unless it was the Metz army, there was no army regularly organized. The town was threatened in the near future by a siege, which would be commenced when the heavy artillery had arrived.

Immediately after taking cognizance of this document, Bazaine ordered Colonel Nugues at once to send copies of it to the commanders of the army corps. The officers who wrote under the Colonel's dictation shared his reprobation. General Jarras, to whom Colonel Nugues protested, considering the transmission of a document of this nature dangerous and censurable, went to speak about it to the Marshal. He returned and ordered the suppression of the final *résumé* in the despatches

sent to the commanders of the army corps ; the despatch which was intended for them would be read to them, and then it would be destroyed. Charlys and many others vivaciously expressed themselves on the subject of this communication, the clandestine character of which they blamed, just as at first they had blamed its disclosure.

On the 14th, a brigadier of Sapeurs-Conducteurs of the 1st Regiment of Engineers, named Pannetier, who had escaped from Sedan, brought newspapers which the Mayor of Ars had handed to him for the Marshal. They contained the proclamation which on September 8th was addressed to the French people by the new Government, and the convocation of the electors on October 16th for the election of a National Assembly. The Mayor of Ars had added to them a copy in his own handwriting of Jules Favre's circular of September 6th. On the 14th, the *Indépendant de la Moselle*—printed on yellow paper, since white had run out—published a proclamation, signed by Coffinières, the Prefect, and the Mayor, in which the Sedan disaster was officially announced. An appeal was made for resistance and patriotism. On the 16th, a general order brought to the knowledge of the Rhine army the news which had been on every tongue for the past week. ' . . . Our military obligations towards the country in danger,' added the Marshal, 'remain the same. Let us, then, continue to serve it with devotion, and with the same energy by defending its territory against the foreigner, and social order against evil passions. I am convinced that your *moral*, so many proofs of which you have already given, will remain on a level with all circumstances, and that you will add fresh titles to the recognition and the admiration of France.'

At the same time the Marshal had an ordinary despatch handed to two horsemen of the 7th Cuirassiers addressed to the Minister of War.

'It is urgent that the army,' he said in this despatch, 'should know what is going on in Paris and in France. We have no communication with the interior, and the strangest rumours are spread about by prisoners handed over to us by the enemy, who also disseminate stories of an alarming nature. It is important that we should receive instructions and news. We are surrounded by considerable forces, through which, after two unfruitful fights, we have in vain tried to break.'

On the following day Du Breuil went to Metz.

At the École d'Application he had sought the eyes of Colonel Poterin, but he saw only a stiff form under a sheet.

'He died early this morning,' said young Chartrain to him. And, after exchanging a few words on the subject of this lugubrious end, he added timidly: 'Major, is it true that one can write to one's parents by *ballon-dépêche*?'

A little paper or cloth balloon, made at the school, each day floated away charged with letters. Du Breuil had a slip of foreign-post paper upon him, and he undertook to get to the Place a few lines written by Chartrain. When on the way he met Barrus, who was very excited.

'At last this Government of pleasure, waste, and lucre, has fallen! The Republic is going to save us. Jules Favre, at least, speaks like a man!'

He drew from his pocket the *Indépendant de la Moselle*—this time a bright pink—and read with conviction:

'... If it is a challenge, we accept it! We will give up neither an inch of our territory nor a stone of our fortresses. An ignominious peace would be a war of extermination at short notice!'

His eyes shone, and there was a pronounced wrinkle on his sectarian forehead.

'What are they waiting for to proclaim the Republic here?' he exclaimed. He stopped short, and, pointing out a pastry-cook's, said: 'Look; at such a time—that is what disgusts me!'

Du Breuil carried away a brief vision of officers with large moustaches eating bonbons, swallowing éclairs, and buns. Barrus jeered:

'These cavalry gentlemen come to do their little marketing in the morning, followed by orderlies with baskets on their arms. It is said that certain chiefs only think of eating well. Our soldiers, since their ration of bread has been reduced to five hundred grammes, have joined the long string of people waiting at the bakers' doors. The other day I saw carts with white bread going through the camps. The soldiers were buying it and throwing away their allowance of bread. This traffic ought to be forbidden. We are not making use of the resources of Metz, but wasting them.'

He stopped short and looked Du Breuil in the face:

'Is it true that Bazaine has written to Prince Frederick Charles asking him for a detailed account of the truth of the situation?'

Du Breuil started.

'I do not know.' He added, rather dryly : 'I do not think so.'

Barrus looked at him with a kind of strange sympathy, of ironical pity.

'Ah yes, you . . . you are honest !'

He shook him by the hand, as though to crush it, and rapidly moved away.

'A little cracked,' thought Du Breuil. And he felt mortally sad. He was hardly commencing to see clearly, to obtain a correct idea of the situation and its consequences. . . . Touching images passed before his eyes. He pictured to himself the Emperor a prisoner, the Empress and the Prince Imperial in exile. These images did not remain fixed ; they defiled as in a nightmare. A new Government—new men . . . The Emperor, with his grave, suffering face ; the fine haughty eyes of the Empress ; the eager crowd of courtiers ! And all that he had heard for several days—the odious swarming of reproaches, recriminations, hopes, ambitions. . . . Those who lamented when thinking of what they were going to lose ; those who rubbed their hands when thinking what they were going to gain ! The *soirée* at Saint-Cloud filled his memory : the correct Champreux, the chatterer Jousset-Gournal, Mme. d'Avilar with her bold face of the intriguer, proud Comtesse de Limal, the yellow-faced Mme. de Vernelay—courtiers ! courtiers ! . . . What were they thinking, saying, and doing at present ? A new Government ! . . . All that foundered with the former Government : the eagles, the victories of the two Empires, the fêtes of peace and war, the solemn salvos of August 15th, and on the morrow—Waterloo and Sedan ! Ah, a merited expiation, but so bitter and so smarting ! As a chastisement for their imprudence, their thoughtlessness, their feebleness, how people would throw mud at the fallen sovereigns, how they were going to make them pay for their days of triumph and splendour ! What dirty stories already were current, what pointless jests ! Du Breuil considered that the respect due to misfortune was sacred. And yet, although, with three-fourths of the country, he had gaily welcomed war, he cursed it when he thought of the censurable lack of foresight, the foolish thoughtlessness of these masters of France, who had lost everything by losing themselves.

Without noticing, he had entered the Bersheims', seeing there the ambulance, the faces which were already familiar to him—

the good old Captain with a white beard, the nigger cymbal-player who laughed with a clear childish laugh, showing his white teeth. There was an empty bed, that of the little soldier who had complained of having a taste for nothing. He had been taken to the tumbrel, sewed up in a sack. Where, then, were the Bersheims? He pushed open D'Avol's door. Some officers were there upon a visit, including Carrouge—impetuous, like to a dry pimenta with his purple face. He was crushing with his irony 'little M. Trochu,' and Gambetta, whom he called 'grand bêta.' No more Empire, no more Imperial Guard, and no more Carrouge!

'I don't serve the Republic!' he said, striking his breast, upon which his cross and medals jostled together.

Comte de Cussac smiled disdainfully:

'We are going to laugh, gentlemen. I am awaiting the Parisians on the ramparts. Peace will be declared in a fortnight.'

Captain de Serres, of D'Avol's battery, approved, straightening himself up in his pelisse, which he nipped with two fingers like a corset. D'Avol had hardly turned his head towards Du Breuil, and mumbled out a 'Good-day, Pierre!' He was in bed. Getting up too soon did not do him any good. Sohier was right.

'Politics to the devil!' he cried angrily. 'We are soldiers; we are blockaded in Metz, and our duty is to get out of it. That is the only thing I know. And if we had heart, we should force Bazaine to make a way out!'

'Oh, oh!' exclaimed voices. . . . 'One doesn't force a Marshal of France like that.'

'No,' said D'Avol in the midst of deep silence; 'but one can replace him when he doesn't wish to fight. There are older Marshals.'

A feeling of uneasiness reigned. D'Avol felt that the silence expressed indecision, blame, respect for discipline, fear of being compromised. He changed his tone:

'You are wearing a pretty ring, Pierre.' He added: 'I recognise it. You had it set at Metz, at the Jew Gugl's, hadn't you?'

The company rose. Anine and M. Bersheim had just entered, the latter bringing lemonade, the former glasses. D'Avol smiled mockingly.

'Isn't it an opal? A fine stone! Ah! it reminds me of a bracelet which I saw a pretty woman wearing.'

Du Breuil felt Anine's eyes rest upon him for a second. . . . What gadfly was stinging D'Avol? Why this allusion, which was evidently intentional? . . . Usually he had so much tact. Had illness changed him to this degree? Had the paroxysm of public misfortunes embittered his unaccommodating character? . . . He persisted:

'Just look at Pierre's ring, Anine. In his place I should be frightened to wear so fine an opal. Those stones bring with them a kind of fatality. . . . But there are seductive fatalities, aren't there, Pierre? I recollect the evening at the Opéra. . . .'

'Jacques,' said Du Breuil, and the serious accent of his voice astonished himself, 'let us finish with this pleasantry.'

Full of anxiety, he sought Anine's eyes. She was no longer there. Bersheim was conversing with the officers, filling their glasses. Du Breuil refused that which was held out to him. D'Avol stretched out his hand, and said ironically:

'To your amours, Pierre!'

Du Breuil pretended not to hear. He almost hated D'Avol at that moment. A teasing joke? . . . No, Jacques had wished to discredit him, to lessen him in Anine's esteem by letting it be supposed. . . . At the thought of this disloyalty, he was seized with anger. . . . Jacques, then, loved his cousin! He was jealous? . . . Why? Did his irascibility, his bitterness, arise, then, from seeing Anine show him, Du Breuil, a slight preference? . . . He was momentarily seized with stupor. Did he himself love Anine? Had he even thought of loving her? . . . No; and yet the idea that D'Avol thought he was the preferred one caused him intense joy. However, this misunderstanding left a deep rancour towards his friend. Wounded *amour-propre*? No; there was something else, which he could not clearly make out, which separated them, D'Avol and he. . . .

Soon he left without being noticed. Anine met him in a passage. Noble and pure, she looked him straight in the face; he lowered his eyes. . . . Did she judge him guilty? Did he owe to her account of his past? He felt an irresistible desire to say to her: 'D'Avol was joking. . . . I have never loved anybody!' and to renounce his sweet and proud *amie*. . . . A few moments afterwards he was resting his elbows on the parapet of the Pont de la Comédie, watching the rapid flowing water, the turbid water which was descended towards Thionville, reaching free countries. A horrible distress, a moral

discouragement paralyzed him. All these reverses, such terrible news, were too much. . . .

He thought of his parents, of Mme. de Guïonic ; stretched out his soul in a supreme effort, and did not even succeed in feeling affected. He felt old, immediately aged at a blow. By following the current of the dark water, he felt a kind of dizziness. Whither were they going? How would this finish? Would they ever leave this Metz, which, like a diabolical loadstone, attracted and held them fast?

D'Avol, Anine . . . He was suffering much. Why did Jacques no longer like him? for he foresaw, divined that D'Avol no longer liked him. What had he done to him? Is it true that certain friendships are like those glass ampullæ which one can throw to the ground without breaking, but which, if touched on a single spot, even lightly, break and fall in dust? Was their friendship like that? . . . Anine's pure face and large eyes irresistibly rose before him. Poor Mme. de Guïonic! and he pitied his own past, his youth, the disappeared Empire. He pitied himself such as he had been—a man of this downfall, a man of this disaster. Ah, to retrieve what was lost, if there was still time to do it! What a lesson! what a lesson!

He had drawn the opal ring from his finger. It sparkled in the dying day, like a reflection of beauty, youth, pleasure; he examined the crack which crossed it for a moment, and suspending it, without regret, as a farewell to a whole past which would never return, he let it fall into the Moselle.

PART V.

CHAPTER I.

THAT evening at the Ban Saint-Martin, in Mme. Guimbail's small house, Du Breuil was thinking. A wretched candle was burning on the mantelpiece. The mirror was dusty, the room was in disorder ; the leaf of the calendar still marked September 20th. Everything had an air of negligence and abandonment.

'May I come in ?' said a voice.

'You, Restaud ! You are not sleeping, then ?'

'Impossible.'

His forehead was marked by a furrow, his mouth was drawn in. He took a few steps across the room, stopped before the calendar, and tried to smile.

'Not in advance.'

'I no longer have the courage to count the days.' And Du Breuil looked at the ephemerides. 'September 20th, anniversary of the Alma. A splendid victory !'

Detaching the leaves one by one until September 23rd appeared very clear upon the block of clean paper, he sent the crumpled scraps of paper behind a piece of furniture with a fillip of his thumb. Restaud watched him doing it with grave attention.

'I don't bother you ?'

Du Breuil affectionately placed his two hands upon his shoulders to seat him in an arm-chair.

'My dear Restaud, I share your distress. If you had not come I should have hunted you up.'

He sought for some tobacco, and discovered two cigars. Restaud refused.

'I take no pleasure in smoking, or in anything. Do you

eat? As for me, I cannot swallow a mouthful. I'm thirsty only.' And, foreseeing an offer: 'No, no; I don't want to drink. It's a nervous state—one's throat is dry, and then a constriction of anguish, a bitterness of bile and gall. . . . Come, I'm bothering you. I'll be off.'

Du Breuil said:

'We are very unfortunate. . . . We must admit that things look bad.'

Restaud rested his feverish forehead on his hand. His lassitude replied for him.

'I went through the bivouacs to-day,' said Du Breuil at last. 'In what a state of idleness and ennui they are allowing our poor soldiers to wallow! The horses fill one with pity.'

He gave heartrending details. This hateful immobility was relaxing all moral elasticity. No exercises, reviews never, nothing which kept military sentiments alive, whilst with the Prussians there was nothing but work, manœuvres, and parades. What had they done since September 1st? Nothing—insignificant operations, simple foraging expeditions, which had been successful at Magny-sur-Seille and at Lauvallier, unsuccessful at Vany. . . . Behind its intrenchments the inactive army, nourished on coarse bread and poor horseflesh, was becoming enfeebled. The horses, reduced to cropping the last blades of grass, vine-shoots, and branchlets of the poplars, became skeletons. Many fell attached to their halters; others, conducted to the watering-place, fell down upon the road to rise no more. The spectacle of the camps, in this country shorn by scythes, as bare as a tomb, contaminated by putrid miasmata around large ditches excavated on the front lines of the camps, was heartrending.

The spectacle in the town was as sad, continued Du Breuil. The ambulances were a mass of sores, gangrene, typhus, and dysentery. The tents and the magazines were infected; the patients froze there at night. The absence of salt made scurvy to be feared, and in Metz, a hospital of pain and death, the soldiers and officers were thronging, notwithstanding the interdictions. . . . Hustling sentries and gendarmes, the troops were pillaging the bakers' shops. The officers bought provisions at any price; the inhabitants complained of the rise in prices. He had surprised Massoli bargaining for twenty-five pots of preserves. Frisch, ordered to get some salt, had paid twenty francs a pound. A commander of an army corps had paid three hundred francs for a truffled pullet.

‘Much good may it do him!’ said Restaud. ‘Everybody cannot make such purchases . . . and wouldn’t want to!’ He added: ‘Much to my sorrow, I have sold one of my horses.’

Officers’ thoroughbreds, humble troop horses, a Colonel’s or a trumpeter’s horse—for all animals the butchery contractor gave the same ridiculous sum, two hundred and thirty francs each. They led them by droves to the Île Chambière, and every day two hundred and fifty fell, the frontal bone crushed by a blacksmith’s hammer. The number of animals to be killed exceeded the needs of the provision administration owing to their being unable to feed them. The surplus was handed over to the Metz municipality, and to the communes in the suburbs.

‘I have sold Guillaume,’ said Du Breuil.

In spite of care, Cydalise was growing thin. She had been ill, having eaten some beech-tree leaves, gathered by Jubault, who was replacing Frisch that particular morning. Unwholesome trees had, however, been mentioned in orders from headquarters.

‘To think that at this hour,’ murmured Restaud with rage, ‘the Prussians may be entering Paris!’

He clenched his fist; his mother and two sisters lived in the Rue de Vaugirard. Paris! At this word a sudden vision passed before Du Breuil. ‘Le Dernier Jour de Corinthe’ appeared before him, Tony Robert-Fleury’s large picture, which he had admired at the Salon with Mme. de Guëonic. To an astonishing degree she even resembled that kneeling woman in the foreground who, uncovering her throat, was watching, fascinated with terror in the midst of her dismayed companions, the entry of the Consul Mummius and his barbarian legions; murder, pillage, fire, the sale by auction of captives, all the horror of a people a prey to the conqueror . . . ‘Le Dernier Jour de Paris!’ . . . A heavy sorrow seized him. Paris, with its splendours, its museums, the beauty of its women, the grace of its wit—Paris in the brutal hands of the enemy! No; such a city would not let itself be violated in that manner! . . . But to organize resistance there, a prompt will, energetic men, were necessary. Now, at that hour, what elements of trouble were perhaps fermenting? The Revolution, pessimists announced, was overthrowing everything. At Lyons, Marseilles, Bordeaux, arose, in the midst of pikes, the red Republic, a Phrygian cap upon her head. Strange rumours—certainly he did not believe in them, but what a state of

enervation in the long-run!—had it that France was in the midst of fire and blood. Was there a government there? Was it still in existence? Marquis was repeating to everybody that Frederick Charles had just been proclaimed Emperor of the French, that he would adopt the Prince Imperial, and that Prussia would give them the Rhenish provinces as an accession gift. Comte de Cussac heard from a good source of the probable restoration of the Orleans dynasty.

Would Paris hold out? That was the great question. . . . And no one dared to hope it. Restaud doubted, Du Breuil doubted; under the frivolous exterior, under the display of luxury and pleasure of the capital, they could not perceive intense beating of the heart, marvellous reservoirs of energy. Besides, the unanimous opinion influenced them. Barrus alone—but people had shrugged their shoulders—had affirmed that Paris would face everything—siege and bombardment—before surrendering.

There were mental reservations at the bottom of men's souls. Grown up, grown old for the past eighteen years under the imperial rule, these innumerable soldiers of the Army of the Rhine lived in a legend of glory, thought and reflected little, accomplished their duty with blunted punctuality. With what apprehensions, what doubts, must they not receive the accession of a new power? If those of advanced opinions and the clear-sighted saluted the dawn of the Republic, the majority, who remained imperialist by habit more than by fidelity, deplored the situation; and even those who blamed the faults of the régime would have contributed, without doubt, to its restoration, if only it did not cost civil war. Du Breuil himself considered the downfall of the Empire as irrevocable. The future was troubled. But, free from all political considerations, even above men, the idea of France stood out in relief before his eyes above everything else.

In the meantime, there was no news of the Government of the National Defence. How was it that none of its emissaries reached Metz? How was it that Bazaine, on his side, had not been able to place himself in communication? Yet Charlys and Major Samuel, the officers charged with the information department, had sure men at their disposal. The Marshal used none of them, and discouraged good intentions. Every day, men of the district, or escaped prisoners, slipped by the Gorze weir, and threw themselves into the midst of the vines. The arrival of a Lieutenant, who had entered by

the aqueduct, only drew from the Marshal this reflection: 'I had ordered, however, that this conduit was to be blown up.'

It was a strange thing, Du Breuil called to mind, that the Marshal solicited information from the enemy, to whose interest it was to mislead him. On September 16th, he sent Colonel Boyer, his Aide-de-camp, to the German headquarters. Prince Frederick Charles was absent. Boyer returned to the outposts on the following day, and insisted upon being received. The Prince's reply, which arrived in the evening, had confirmed the capitulation of Sedan on every point; the German armies were before Paris. Frederick Charles said he was authorized to make any communication which the Marshal desired. A fragment of a newspaper, containing the names of the members of the Government of the National Defence, and a few decrees drawn up and signed by them, accompanied this letter. The Prince remarked that the Republic, having sprung into being at the Hôtel de Ville, and not at the Corps Législatif, was unrecognised by part of France, as well as by the monarchical powers.

'I have no prejudice for or against,' said Restaud. 'I will acclaim the Republic if it helps us to drive out the Prussians. Rather than sign a shameful peace, we ought to struggle to the end—conquer or die!'

'Well thought!' sighed Du Breuil. 'Why cannot they hear you in Bazaine's cabinet?'

He stretched out his arm in that direction. It was a closed and silent place. An air of mystery had hovered around it for some time. The coming and going of German officers sent to parley had attracted attention. Something was being hatched which, even to those who saw nothing equivocal or suspicious, remained clandestine.

Restaud was silent, so as not to express any judgment. Du Breuil said:

'No, no! The Marshal does not ignore the feelings of the army, yours and mine. If the great chiefs, if those who have authority, do not make him hear the truth loud enough, the humble ones, the anonymous crowd has spoken, speaks every day. The Marshal receives and reads all the unsigned letters. They adjure him to attempt the honour of arms; beg him to enter, he and his generals, into communion with the army which suffers without complaint, and which obeys while champing its bit. You read, Restaud, the splendid letter which

one of ours (Charlys, it is believed) sent to Bazaine a month ago? Since then'—he lowered his voice—'the tone of respect has changed. Imperious, even insulting, summonses recall him to those duties which he has forgotten.'

'I want to hope,' said Restaud. 'We must. What will become of us without faith?'

'Faith!' Du Breuil looked at him with bitter pity. 'Come, politics is a miserable thing. . . . Is it necessary that personal ambition should lessen the feeling of honour in certain souls? Ought Bazaine to ask Prince Frederick Charles for information? Ought he to lend a complaisant ear to these disastrous pieces of news which they have an interest in making him believe? . . . There is another thing: you have read these copies of the *Figaro* and the *Moniteur de Reims*. The Prussian Government is only disposed to treat with the Emperor, the Empress Regent, or with the Marshal, who holds his command from the Emperor. A big but an enticing hook; who knows if he isn't going to take it?'

'We are a force,' said Restaud hesitatingly. 'They can treat with us.'

'Yes, but at what price? Shall we be the restorers of a fallen régime? Pretorians, then? After having fired on Prussians, shall we open fire with our mitrailleuses upon Frenchmen? Are we going to re-establish order in the blood of our country, so torn and so unfortunate? . . . The army is not a political instrument in the hands of the ambitious. We must only serve France. Let us look the truth in the face. Our inaction is leading us to the abyss.' He added ironically: 'Ah, the Marshal's vacillations! Was it not his first thought to recognise the new Government? Immediately they scratch out the words *impérial*, *empereur*, on the promotion forms, and those for the Legion of Honour. They order new characters at the printers! . . . Since then they have returned to the old ones.'

'But the Marshal is right,' said Restaud. 'We are not released from our oath.'

'Ah, only let us keep it until the end! May Bazaine be inspired by the example of Fabert, upon the base of whose statue on the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville are these proud words: "If, to prevent a fort which the King has entrusted to me from falling into the hands of the enemy, it was necessary for me to place myself, my family, and all that is mine, into the breach, I should not hesitate a moment to do it."'

A silence followed in the midst of deep emotion. Restaud at last said :

‘ There are bitter hours in our profession. The powerlessness of the soldier has need to be passive ; it is not resigned. What abnegation, what force of renunciation, is necessary to stifle the voice of his conscience !’

‘ You admit it, then—you, the man of duty ?’

‘ Yes ; it is true our duty is at times difficult.’

Du Breuil added :

‘ It is nothing when one knows it. But if one day we seek for it ?’

‘ I shall never know but one duty—passive obedience.’

And Du Breuil thought he again could see Lacoste, so simple and so great. He objected :

‘ Until the end, whatever happens ?’

‘ Until the end,’ said Restaud.

But anguish discomposed his features ; a great struggle was visibly going on within him.

‘ So,’ concluded Du Breuil, choosing his words because he felt the importance of what they were saying, ‘ those who consider that things cannot last thus, that an incapable or ambitious chief ought to be replaced . . .’

D’Avol’s cutting voice vibrated in his ears :

‘ There are older Marshals !’

Restaud stopped him :

‘ Do not speak to me of the insubordinates, of rebels ! If they were a hundred times right, if I myself thought as they did, if my brother were in the crowd, I would shoot them at the first act of insubordination. If anarchy dissolves the army, what will become of us ? Discipline, Du Breuil—recollect that terrible and magnificent word written on the first page of the *Service Intérieur* : “ Discipline, the principal force of armies.”’

He looked him in the face with proud conviction, which, coming from the heart, went straight to his. Du Breuil, touched, said :

‘ You are right, my friend.’

A pale fire shone from Restaud’s face, his eyes took an expression of inexpressible nobility.

‘ You have never seriously doubted. A man like you cannot doubt. It is for others to guard themselves against the temptations of pride.’

Pride ? Why this word ? How it exactly cut D’Avol,

whom Restaud, however, did not know. Yes; noble pride, certainly, but incompatible with the soldier's renunciation. . . . 'Discipline, the principal force of armies!'

'Come,' said Restaud, 'we must try to sleep. Courage!'

'Good-night, friend.'

And their hands clasped with a great impulse of affection and esteem. Restaud left; Du Breuil felt more alone, sadder. Why had they not breathed a word of that mysterious personage who had come in the afternoon to find Bazaine? . . . After all, Restaud, who had been absent since noon, and who spoke little, might be ignorant of the event of the day: that unknown man in civil dress who had been brought by an officer of General de Cissey in the wagonette used by the officers sent to parley. Introduced into the Marshal's presence, he had conversed for a long time with him, had stated he came from Hastings, where the Empress was residing. They knew nothing more of him.

How was it they had not spoken of that? Bah! what was the good? What was the use of always criticising? . . . He listened.

A little melody sounded in the distance. . . . In order to be more certain, he opened the window. Yes; he had heard correctly. Who, then, was amusing himself at that hour by playing the flute? It flowed like an ironical and sad streamlet of water. It modulated no particular air, and recalled all known tunes. The musician improvised as he recollected. And this shrill and solitary wail had a strange effect, rising in the great silence above the Ban Saint-Martin, ascending into the night impregnated with the slumber of the army, above confused dreams and heavy nightmares. The feeble sound, so feeble, only a breath, became annoying in the long-run like the buzzing of an insect. Puzzled, Du Breuil noiselessly crept downstairs and walked round the house. The noise came from the stable; a ray of light from a lantern lit up the face of Jubault. Was the little *faubourien*, his short reed to his lips, killing his home-sickness? Was he thinking of some amour of the *barrière*? . . . He was warbling with so good a heart that Du Breuil refrained from interrupting the song by a blow upon the door with his fist. When he had remounted to his bedroom, he still heard in the distance the strange little voice. In its tenuity there was something touching, a lightness which seemed to mock. With a smack of vulgarity in it; it repeated over and over again an air under

which Du Breuil, by having heard Jubault hum it, guessed the words :

‘Malbrough s’en va t’en guerre,
 Dans une bouteille ! . . .
 Mais il en reviendra dans un panier . . .
 Dans un panier percé !’

In the afternoon of the next day, September 24th, the return of the mysterious personage put the staffs of the Ban Saint-Martin into a state of anxiety. There was the busy bearing of chiefs, questioning looks, whispered confidences ; on every face disquietude and curiosity. Truly, the unknown kept souls in suspense, and comments crossed and contradicted each other. To screen him from the inquisitive, the Marshal had ordered the doors of his house to be closed.

‘Some spy,’ said Floppe. ‘One has only to see whence he comes. Without any doubt, he is a Prussian agent. And, between parentheses, I may say this gentleman entered here as though into an inn. Why didn’t they stop him at the outposts until Bazaine had decided to receive him or not ? But the Marshal was doubtless in too great a hurry to wait.’

‘You see evil everywhere,’ said Massoli. ‘You know perfectly well that this gentleman comes to take back the Luxemburg doctors we have in Metz to their own country.’

As Floppe opened wide his eyes, Massoli stated precisely :

‘Certainly, the seven or eight Luxemburgers who came at the opening of the war to nurse the wounded. . . .’ (Du Breuil saw again one of them, the gorilla of Borny and of the Saint-Clément ambulance ; too striking a figure for him to forget it. . . .) ‘These doctors form a part of the International Association of Geneva ; the blockade troubles them ; they have asked the Marshal to send them home. Up to the present they have feared they would divulge what they have seen in our lines. This gentleman, who is their chief, simply comes to fetch them, in accord with General von Stiehle.’

‘Simply !’ jeered Floppe. ‘Is it for that purpose that he has remained closeted for hours with the Marshal, so that yesterday evening at eleven o’clock they still talked ?’

‘And the proof,’ said Francastel, throwing himself into the discussion like a giddy-brains, ‘is that when this individual wished to enter the enemy’s lines it was too late ; our main-guard trumpet sounded in vain. And what will astonish you is the fact that, having left Moulins, where he must have slept, at five o’clock this morning, our man had returned from the

Germans at noon. On the way he related in a peremptory tone to Arnous-Rivière, the officer charged with the parley department, a heap of things—that he is sent by the Empress, that he brings a letter from her. He comes to ask Bazaine to support the cause of the Regency with his army; Canrobert and Bourbaki are to be asked to co-operate in this restoration.'

'That is too much,' murmured Restaud incredulously. 'And the name of this diplomatist?'

'You don't know it?' asked Francastel. He enjoyed for a moment the general curiosity, and then said: 'His name is Régnier.'

A deception followed: this name told them nothing. They constructed a thousand suppositions, based on homonyms. Laune had heard much talk formerly of a Régnier, who was a kind of meddlesome adventurer mixed up in the 1848 Revolution, and who launched unfortunate industries. . . . Was this the same man? That appeared to him doubtful. What was this personage of the third order doing in the midst of such great interests?

Marquis, always informed, was saying, with an air of great mystery:

'He is an agent of the Provisional Government, skilfully disguised as a member of the International! He brings news. The Emperor is not a prisoner. He is moving towards Denmark, which is declaring for us.'

'No, no, you're not in it, dear friend!'

And Floppe, in the midst of laughter, suggested that the unknown one only brought some bottles of black dye for Massoli's hair. He had need of them, because it was turning to verdigris. Apparently the reserve stock of the Metz hairdressers had been exhausted. . . . Massoli was approaching, so he became silent.

Francastel continued:

'In any case, he isn't a subaltern agent. The Marshal would not personally trouble himself to go and find Canrobert and Bourbaki!'

Bazaine had, in fact, after consulting with the unknown, mounted on horseback. Du Breuil was perplexed. The emissary appeared to him still more suspicious when Charlys suddenly said to him:

'Where, then, is Laune?' And, as if he could not remain silent longer, he decided to confide in him, Du Breuil. 'Do you know what I have just heard from Colonel Boyer?'

Invited by the Marshal to sleep in the French camp yesterday evening, Régnier had the cheek to reply: "No, I don't want to remain here, where there is only bad horseflesh broth. I prefer going to Ars, where there is good beef broth." Good beef broth with Prince Frederick Charles! . . . I should have shown him out with a horse-whipping!

Laune came up. A bilious fever was making his eyelids brown, and turning his face yellow.

'And I should have had him hanged as a spy! Don't they say that the Marshal——'

He bit his lips and kept silent.

Anxiety increased when they learnt that Bazaine, who had found neither Canrobert nor Bourbaki at their headquarters, had urgently sent for them, and when they saw the chief officers arrive one after the other. Lebœuf had made a short appearance about four o'clock, but, feeling a sense of uneasiness at the silence which had set in, he immediately withdrew. The doors, carefully guarded by Bazaine's officers, all steeped in mystery, were again closed behind Canrobert and Bourbaki.

'What are they up to inside?' Floppe was murmuring. 'It isn't fair, gentlemen. The Marshal's staff alone is in the know. They are keeping us in quarantine.'

'Don't trouble yourself, Floppe. I know everything,' declared Francastel. 'This Régnier is an imperialist agent. France is a prey to anarchy, and a restoration may alone save the country.'

'Admitting that he accepts the remedy!'

'But a regency of the Empress with the Prince Imperial, and Bazaine as Grand Constable, offers nothing inadmissible,' improved Francastel.

Massoli triumphed.

'What was I saying to you, gentlemen, with your mania for finding noon at two o'clock? . . . The only question is that of sending back the Luxemburg doctors to their own country. The Marshal has told them to assemble at the Ban Saint-Martin. I have just spoken to one of them; you know, the one who is so ugly, and who grimaces like this.'

Massoli, to imitate him, became hideous. 'The gorilla!' thought Du Breuil. This recollection aroused in him a kind of superstitious uneasiness, a repugnance, as though he had retained the fear of seeing bent over him on a day of battle, in some solitary ambulance, the hairy face, the blue eyes, of this man, armed, as at Borny, with forceps and scissors, red with having been used in quivering flesh. . . .

There was no doubt, in fact, that the negotiator had come to take back the Luxemburg doctors to their own country. With the dying evening they saw them arrive—almost all young, smiling, happy to leave. The oldest had just received a brevet of the Legion of Honour, and the gorilla was wearing a képi with the Cross of Geneva, which Régnier had asked for him. One after the other they disappeared into the Marshal's house. However, part of the truth transpired, in spite of the silence which was kept—Bazaine was negotiating, but with what object, with what idea? . . . Night was gathering. Bourbaki left, going towards his headquarters at Plappeville. The conference was, then, concluded? No; he returned shortly afterwards. The door was opened and closed again. And the mysterious envoy, the chattering and peremptory man whom Arnous-Rivière had depicted, still remained closeted with the Marshal. Why did he not leave with his Luxemburg doctors? It was because he was dining with Bazaine and Bourbaki. At nightfall Captain Arnous-Rivière conducted Régnier back again in his wagonette, in company with a man wearing a képi, upon which was a Geneva Cross, whom he did not know. The doctors followed in another carriage.

That night an aurora borealis filled the northern sky with an immense red light, crossed with white rays and luminous brush-lights. Du Breuil could not sleep. Jubault's little flute sounded shrill in his ears with the persistence of a mosquito until a very late hour. In the morning, great was the stupor upon learning that Bourbaki had left for Hastings. The Marshal had lent him his own civilian clothes, even to his braces. Charlys, knowing Du Breuil to be very trustworthy, related to him what he knew. The Empress, Régnier had affirmed, asked for Canrobert or Bourbaki. And the former refusing to leave Metz, the latter had consented, but on certain conditions: he asked for a written order, and the promise that the Guard should not be brought into action during his absence. . . . The object of this mission? To bring the Sovereign back to Metz by proclaiming her Regent, and to treat with the enemy? Or else would the Metz army, transported to a neutralized zone of the territory, protect the convocation of the Corps Législatif and the Senate, such as they were constituted during the last session, and would the two Chambers proclaim a regular Government, Prussia engaging to recognise it, and the army to re-establish it? . . . What would become under that arrangement of the Provisional

Government, so decided to fight, so eager for resistance, and, whether one liked it or not, so ardent in heart, so thoroughly French?

To treat with the enemy was an expedient which revolted Charlys. Alone the fate of arms, not the hazard of political negotiations, had a chance, in the opinion of all patriotic officers, of enlarging the prison in which they were etiolating. But time was pressing: around them was a solidly intrenched army riveting the circle. And in the fort they only had enough to last out until October 18th. Each day was using up their forces, dismounting horsemen and batteries, ruining the spirit of the troops.

‘Whither are we going?’ said Charlys, with a shrug of his shoulders, which still more lengthened out his thin body.

And everybody was saying that; everybody who was passing was quarrelling, and in a state of deep rage. It seemed as though the army, from the obscurest to the most illustrious, stricken by a great dizziness, contemplated itself with sightless eyes, powerlessly sinking into the abyss, like earth which slowly settles.

That day, which was a Sunday, the departure of General Bourbaki, and his replacement at the head of the Guard by General Desvaux, provided matter for all conversations. The stupor of General Boisjol and the emotion of Major Carrouge were at their height. Others—Massoli, Francastel—were conversing about a list of decorations which had been signed on the previous day; their eyes were sparkling with desire and envy. This mean egoism under such circumstances rather sickened Du Breuil. The weather was fine. For a long time he contemplated from his window the vast plain of the Ban Saint-Martin, dust or lake of mud alternately. Between a triple zone of felled trees, it displayed its naked earth, its dismal desolation. Although he was free that day, he had not the heart to go to see the Bersheims. He had a bitter taste in his mouth, and his limbs were tired. He was eaten up with ennui and a nameless disgust. He looked at the calendar. The ephemerides bore the date September 25th, 1799: General Masséna overcomes Korsakov’s Russians at Zurich!

Masséna! He thought of the admirable siege of Genoa, which the Metz newspapers, all the more exalted as the military censor was cutting, suppressing their articles, making a point, they had said, of paralyzing their patriotism, had called to

mind the other day. Masséna, the hero of Genoa, of Rivoli, of Eckmühl, of Aspern. . . . Why had they not a similar man?

On Monday Bersheim arrived at headquarters. The excellent man was very excited. He took Du Breuil aside.

‘Are you aware of the emotion in the town, my friend? Do you know a large number of the inhabitants are drawing up a petition to ask the Marshal to make a sortie, and to open the campaign? By remaining here, he is leading us to our ruin. . . . Let him surrender, if he dares, with an army of a hundred and sixty thousand men, but let him first get away from Metz, and leave us to defend ourselves! We have provisions, a sufficient garrison, and, be sure of it, Bazaine gone, Coffinières will do his duty.’

In the presence of Du Breuil’s darkened face, he made an affectionate gesture.

‘Metz does not suspect the army, friend! The invasion of our shops and our markets by officers and soldiers we would willingly support. What is impoverishment to us? We will face the siege, if necessary; the only thing we ask is to fight like Strasbourg, like Toul, like so many other towns which do their duty!’

‘Toul has just capitulated,’ said Du Breuil.

‘At least after resistance,’ replied Bersheim. ‘Strasbourg, the surrender of which the Marshal is in too great a hurry to announce, still holds out. But here, what are we doing? What are we waiting for? Famine? The wheat of Metz, which ought to have been reserved for man’s nourishment, has been bought, carried off by the military administration. The army horses are eating it. There is pillage and waste, and while provisions are running low in a terrifying way, they have done nothing, or almost nothing, to procure others within the circle itself of the investment. Is not such sluggishness shameful?’

Re-echoing the feelings of the town, he complained bitterly of the Governor, of his wilfulness in constituting neither the Council of Defence nor the Victualling Commission. The Municipal Council was occupied with the food question for the first time on September 14th, and on the 15th a decree from Coffinières had ordered returns to be made out in regard to wheat and flour in Metz, and the fixing of the price of these commodities, in addition to that of horseflesh. They were wise measures, but insufficient, and besides that were badly executed. The evil continued until the month of August, when the Governor had refused to allow the resources of the

neighbouring villages to flow into Metz, for fear of alarming the inhabitants.

‘And Bourbaki? Is he really going to bring back to us the Empress and the Prince Imperial? . . . I conceive that that seduces some Marshals who owe everything to the Empire, but one must count with the Republican population of Metz—Metz which they treat as though it did not exist. . . . Will not some man rise up, then, with the courage to speak plainly to the Marshal?’

Du Breuil smiled a melancholy smile.

‘At least Metz,’ said Bersheim forcibly, ‘will know how to make itself heard by the voice of its Municipal Council and Mayor. I certify that. Besides, all the general or superior officers do not participate in this theory of passive renunciation. Those who want to recall Bazaine to his duty are numerous. Obedience to the chief who leads them against the enemy, refusal to obey the chief who wishes to surrender them, that is what I hear professed at my house by a few men of heart—General Boisjol, Barrus, D’Avol, Courage. . . .’

‘I cannot discuss that,’ said Du Breuil.

Bersheim made a gesture expressive of helplessness.

‘But whither are we going? What are they doing? What does the Marshal want?’

Du Breuil looked at him sorrowfully. What could he know—he, one of the lowest—of the projects of the man who commanded the fate of two hundred thousand soldiers and citizens, of the man with the heavy face, puffed-out eyelids and impenetrable look, who, disguising his grandeur under a face or a mask of simplicity, confined, intrenched himself behind the railings of his park and the walls of his house, who never appeared in the town, who was unknown in the hospitals and ambulances, who was hidden among his little court of officers in the midst of suspicious whisperings and secret meetings?

‘Time is passing by,’ said Bersheim bitterly. ‘What have they done during the last month? Where shall we be in a month’s time?’

One month ago it was the sham sortie of Grimont under the torrential storm. What ground they had gone over, and on what a slope! Where were the illusions, the hopes which persisted then? . . . Bersheim continued:

‘They even discourage those who attempt anything. An engineer offered to cast war projectiles; the artillery management showed him to the door. One of my friends, M. Cordier,

promised one thousand francs to anyone who would take a letter to Paris and bring back the answer. General Coffinières, after having severely asked him on what authority he meddled in these matters, said he intended to retain the most authority in the execution of the project. M. Cordier introduced him to some trustworthy emissaries. Not one of them has been employed.' He returned to the question of Bourbaki. This departure was a veritable obsession. 'To go away thus, disguised and at night, in the midst of doctors! These doctors were not more than seven, and they affirm that the safe-conduct brought by Régnier consisted of nine persons. The German headquarters foresaw, then, Bourbaki's departure? How suspicious all that is!'

'You are very pessimistic,' said Du Breuil, in a tone of friendly reproach. It seemed to him that Bersheim was talking like a man who has been influenced. If he listened to that sectarian Barrus, who was always in revolt, or to D'Avol, who was so bitter! . . . He felt more unhappy when he was left alone. He gave a hearty welcome, however, to young Chartrain, who, still weak, had come to thank him for his kindness. He even read a letter which the little quarter-master had asked him to send to his father, M. Chartrain, Conseiller d'Etat, so as to make sure it contained no irregularities. The officers who were sent to parley consented, in a spirit of surprising tolerance, to an exchange of private letters, which were submitted to the censor in the two camps. The pleasure of his good action lasted only a short time; spleen was lying in wait for him.

CHAPTER II.

HAPPILY, a diversion occurred the next day, that of the Peltre engagement. Major Mourgues dared to declare that the plan of attack was impracticable. The scepticism of the officers of Bazaine's staff was astonishing! If one were to believe them, the soldier did not wish to march any more; to fight only irritated the enemy, who immediately took vengeance on the villages. What was the good of *actions de détail*, when the great fight was lost? Why not treat for peace, and take their revenge later? . . . One should have heard little Mourgues' Provençal accent, a blustering echo of the more discreet remarks of his chief, General Boyer, for

Bazaine's first Aide-de-camp was wearing the stars since yesterday. 'États de Services?' jeered Floppe. 'Des tas de Services!' The pun was a great success. Floppe was the *bête noire* of these gentlemen, and Mourgues took care not to speak so loud in his presence. But Floppe on the previous day had taken over the parley department, of the delicate duties of which Captain Arnous-Rivière had just been relieved, and which in the future the captains of the staff were in turn each day filling.

Detonations from Fort Queuleu, about nine o'clock, re-echoed in Du Breuil's heart. Since he had heard the Saint-Quentin thundering forth at the time of his first parleying mission, he never listened to the loud voice of the forts without emotion. They had worked without interruption, and the forts were now strongly armed. He had wished to see them at work, left to themselves, helping Metz to defend herself alone. They were able to do it.

The cannon was redoubling in violence. Du Breuil, feeling an irresistible desire to know, set off. At Fort Queuleu, where he knew some officers, the situation was good. General Lapasset, notwithstanding Mourgues, had conceived a bold *coup de main*, the capture of the Château de Mercy and Peltre. A protected locomotive, carrying a few determined men, would proceed in the meantime at full speed on Courcelles-sur-Nied, couple to it the waggons containing the enemy's provisions, and bring them back to Metz. M. Dietz, a skilful engineer of the Eastern Company, took charge of the manœuvre.

It was a beautiful day; the waters of the Seille sparkled in the midst of the devastation of the landscape. Du Breuil was commencing to ascend the Queuleu slope, which dominated the plain with its pointed steeple, when he perceived, a short distance away, some soldiers escorting German prisoners. A bright-eyed Lieutenant, his face covered with dust, his hands blackened with powder, whom he questioned, said to him with volubility:

'Victory, Major! The Château de Mercy finished at a mouthful! Peltre was less easy, but we took it all the same *à la fourchette*! Isn't that so, lads?'

There were laughs among the soldiers, while the stiff German prisoners continued to advance with arrogant countenances. A Captain added:

'Unfortunately, the protected locomotive was unable to get as far as Courcelles-sur-Nied, the enemy having been warned

and cut the line. But we are bringing the traitor back. My men discovered him as he was escaping from a baker's.'

'Look!' resumed the Lieutenant. 'There he is.'

And, between two soldiers, Du Breuil saw pass a miserable bundle, a wretch of a man with bound wrists, his face covered with spittle, and one eye hidden under cow-dung. To his profound astonishment, he recognised Gugl.

'But I know him,' he murmured.

The Jew raised his head. His eye, his polluted face, took an intense and frenzied expression. All the life which the miserable wretch still possessed issued forth from his skin.

'I am innocent,' he cried, in a heartrending voice, trying to escape from his keepers. 'See, the Machor knows me. I know him. I mountet for him a peautiful golt rink. I am an honest man, a good vater, everybody can say so. I swear it on the heads of my chiltren!'

'Judas!' said a soldier. A German prisoner commenced to laugh disdainfully.

They dragged Gugl away. Du Breuil turned away his eyes.

'Are you sure?' he asked.

'Not the slightest doubt,' said the Captain. 'He was selling brandy in the railway workshops; he saw the preparations, and early this morning he went to forewarn the enemy. He has confessed it. He will suffer for it!'

A soldier was passing, holding by the legs a large red hare, which was bleeding.

'Let's have a look, Feitu!'

The soldier proudly raised the animal.

'It came to die at my feet,' said the Captain. 'It received a plum during the fight. That will make splendid jugged hare!'

He gave a little childlike laugh, and rejoined the prisoners' convoy. A young soldier was running, behindhand, feverish, hilarious; he was talking aloud, shaking his hand, which was bandaged in a checked pocket-handkerchief.

'It don't matter. I knocked the fat pig's brains out.'

He had so contented an air that Du Breuil felt a sadness from it. Gugl's look, the terrible eagerness to live which was stamped on that discomposed face, left in him a feeling of pity mingled with disgust. Again he saw the cramped, dusty shop, the woman, the children almost albinos; then the day upon which Gugl had brought the ring to him at the Hôtel de l'Europe, and also the glass-topped box at Grimont, containing tobacco, rum, nougat. . . . He had done good 'pisness'

afterwards in baker's white bread, which the Jew carried into the bivouacs and sold very dear. He then commenced to traffic in brandy. That did not prevent him from buying watches and jewellery. Gugl was all over the place. One day one saw him with the 6th corps at Saint-Éloy; the next with the 4th, at Lorry. The soldiers' pleasantries and their brutality exercised over him a fascination mingled with horror. That monster beast, the army, attracted and repulsed him. But he always returned to it, so strong was the desire for gain. It was that, and also perhaps an inborn necessity to betray, which had lost him; having sold everything, he must in the end sell himself. Besides, being a Dresden Jew, he detested the French. All the same, Du Breuil would never have suspected him. And Metz was swarming with similar spies! . . . Then he suddenly remembered the opal ring, recollected Borny, where he had believed in its witchcraft. It was, then, necessary that the stone should be fatal to someone.

General Lapasset, whose hard face was aglow with pleasure, appeared. Behind him, on a bed of boughs, four soldiers carried a fat pig crowned with leaves; an artilleryman was dragging a recalcitrant pink sow by the leg. Others were brandishing strings of fowls, loaves of bread stuck upon their bayonets. Further away, light-infantry men were leading cows with swollen udders, oxen, sheep, and goats. A stout sapper, whose beard descended to his stomach, was clasping a lamb in his arms, casting over it a protecting look. Its mother, a limping sheep, was following, bleating. The joy, the pride of these honest fellows, was a pleasure to see, and a pleasure also were these animals, doomed to the slaughter, which brought with them the odour of fields and stables, a sweetness of rustic peace in their slow walk, their vacant eyes, and their plaintive cries. Du Breuil noticed the long head of a sheep with closed eyes, and the slavering muzzle of a cow. The appearance of these droves appeared to him unusual, for it was a long time since he had seen them. Alone the innumerable agonies of the horses glutted his eyes.

He imagined he heard the Captain's cheerful voice, 'That will make splendid jugged hare!' Yes, and succulent pots-au-feu and substantial roasts. A passing vision of smoking dishes came up before him, and he found himself suddenly once more at the Café Riche with D'Avol, on the night of the 'Marseillaise' and the Opéra. Again he saw the unctuous butler: 'Duckling à la Rouennaise? Lamb cutlets?' Certainly,

instead of horse steaks and a few pieces of potatoes, he would have paid dearly for such a feast. But he thought of the miseries of the soldier. . . .

What a privation it was to the troop to be without bread, savoury brown bread! At the Place there was only left a mouthful of spongy, juiceless paste, mixed with bran and other refuse. The supply of horseflesh, which was increased, did not make up for it. Tough and fibrous, it was indigestible to the most robust stomachs. Worse still was the lack of salt, which was indispensable to the organism. Even in the town there was almost a total lack of it. Artificial fabrications had only given very meagre results. They were utilizing the Bellecroix spring of salt water. Bodies of men went there for the necessary water for the *soupe*, interminable files of vehicles, loaded with barrels, were stationed there for hours; but the insufficiency of the output had not allowed of the crystallization by boiling of the immense quantities which were required. In the case of many this privation gave rise to a keen, intolerable suffering. Officers had voraciously disputed over the salt, then the brine of Metz, and finally over a product which the chemists baptized with the name 'salted water.' The Bellecroix spring losing many of its alkaline properties owing to the great consumption of it, a doctor proposed to extract the precious matter from the tan-pits. His offer had been declined, so as not to injure, it was said, private interests. God only knows with what avidity the wretched soldiers tried to procure this vital salt. They had seen some begging for it at the houses; others stole it; certain of them, to the detriment of their health, took saltpetre; many at the outposts would have braved rifle-shots to go and see if the salt-cellars and the salt-boxes on the walls in the farms still contained a few grains.

'Du Breuil!'

An officer of Frossard's staff, with a large nose and long moustache, came up at a slow gallop, on a horse in excellent form.

'Laisné? What are you doing here?'

They shook hands. Laisné said:

'Come for news. Half-success. However, the affair has shown the spirit of the troops. But if they want provisions it isn't there; it's at Thionville that they must go seek them. . . .'

He spoke of a large convoy of biscuit and flour, affirmed that the Marshal knew of its existence, having been informed

on the previous day, or two days before, by an emissary of Colonel Turnier. . . . Whence did he get these details? He added:

‘But Bazaine doesn’t bother much about it. What he wants is to get out of his scrape, become the arbitrator of the destinies of the country. He thinks he is still in Mexico.’

Du Breuil stroked the neck of the broad-backed Normandy horse.

‘What do you do to keep it in such good condition?’

The Aide-de-camp, who lived in intimate relations with a Commander-in-Chief, whose table and stables passed for being well served, replied with pride:

‘I feed it.’

He returned to his idea.

‘Marshal Bazaine is no enemy to a mild ambition. It’s a bad business when a petticoat is mixed up in it.’

He recalled the ascendancy exercised by Bazaine’s first wife, and her death—a case of poisoning, it was believed—which put an end to the vicissitudes of a mysterious love tragedy. The Marshal’s animosity against MacMahon arose from the fact that the latter, when Brigadier-General at Tlemcen, had refused to add a recommendatory note to a letter which Bazaine, then a Colonel, wrote to the Minister of War—a letter asking permission to marry this woman, a Spaniard of great beauty but lowly birth.

‘A fine girl!’ he said. ‘I should trust the second less. She appears more complicated. These Mexicans have political ethics of their own.’

He winked his eye.

‘Apropos of women, our comrade Décherac doesn’t weary himself. I saw him the other day. They were driving him in a carriage. A very pretty woman was screening him with her sunshade, and the husband was driving. Décherac had the happiest air of the three. I shall ask him to introduce me as his successor.’

And big Laisné, pulling at his moustache with an expression which was partly serious and partly in jest, said:

‘It is true, my dear fellow, only the wounded have time for flirtations. We others live the lives of cenobites. No more love! . . . The rare, suitable crinolines are for the great chiefs; and as for those ladies you know about, they have too many customers.’

Du Breuil understood to what miserable creatures, to what

poor haunts of pleasure, Laisné alluded. He made a little grimace expressive of disgust. Since the commencement of the war, he was again beginning the apprenticeship of a manly and pure life, wholly devoted to intellectual labour and the expenditure of physical strength. But when he thought he had forgotten the exigencies of the heart and the flesh, images unexpectedly assailed him during sleeplessness and in the darkness; they haunted him, more incoherent, at the approach of sleep. Frail silhouettes passed in the crowd in the streets, or he called up thoughts of discreet amours. Mme. de Guïonic appeared; he again saw the spots on her open-work stockings, her fresh, bare neck. Then the name of Rose Noël sounded in his ears in the midst of a light clatter of glasses and plates. Suddenly he thought of the auburn-haired glove-shop assistant who, on the day of his departure, had beckoned to him with a smile. His temples throbbed. Laisné growled:

‘It isn’t a convoy of provisions which they ought to hold in readiness for us at Thionville, but bazaars of captives, bebies of beautiful slaves as with the ancients. . . . Think of a hundred and sixty thousand men deprived of all opportunities for love!’

He uttered a somewhat coarse expression, and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, said:

‘After all, I don’t care. My hostess is obliging. And yours?’

Without waiting for the reply, he looked at his watch, and with an ‘Au revoir!’ set off at a slow gallop.

Du Breuil followed him with his eyes. This tranquil assurance, which so many brave but frivolous officers possessed, always caused him annoyance. How many thus lived from day to day, correctly carrying out their duty, consoled for public misfortunes by the consciousness that they did not contribute to them? The feeling of a higher fatality alleviated that of their powerlessness. He envied these military philosophers, so numerous—he to whom this powerlessness was the most bitter heartsore. How many times had he not heard the imperious voices which prompted action and initiative in him, and repulsed them as suggestions of pride! Ah, if he were Bazaine! how he would break out, and then make for the open country, if necessary, to die! Then he thought that he only had his life to lose. Who knows what scruples, what vertigo, might paralyze him if he were the supreme chief of so many existences? . . . ‘No,’ he repeated to himself, ‘this

inaction is dishonourable. . . . Enough with *pourparlers* and suspicious negotiations. The fight, and, if necessary, death—the simple death of Lacoste, of Langlade, and of Poterin. Life is not so precious as honour !’

Returning by the Sablon plain, he saw a tumultuous gathering at the entrance to the village. Men with raised arms, and faces upon which were expressions of murderous madness, were crowding with yells and hoots around some soldiers and a gesticulating officer. Du Breuil made out Gugl bound to a tree—around him piles of fagots. His face was a mass of blood, and from his mouth, a large black hole, issued the convulsive yells of a stuck pig. Some children were executing a Caribbee dance, and an enormous red-haired carter, the convoy driver of Sarrebrück and Gravelotte, the instinctive brute of popular affrays, was striking a light, crying :

‘ Let’s burn the spy ! let’s burn the spy !’

The carter’s look met that of Du Breuil, who recognised him. Hustling women, who were like furies, the carter yelled :

‘ To my aid, friends ! Let’s burn the vermin !’

But the officer to whom Gugl was entrusted—it was the Captain of jugged-hare fame—energetically protested. He swore in a voice of thunder, saying that the court-martial would decide, that they bothered him, and that he did not like brawling.

‘ Do you hear, man ?’ he declared to the carter, who with lowered head was already pushing himself forward.

‘ That the only obstacle !’ sneered the brute. ‘ Here are people siding with the Prussians !’

‘ Say that again !’

‘ Yes,’ vociferated the man. ‘ Here are people siding . . .’

The phrase stuck in his throat. The dry, thick-set Captain had raised him under the arms, and, his breath cut short, the giant rolled in the dust. In the midst of the intimidated but still raging crowd, the soldiers led, or, rather, carried away Gugl, who had fainted.

In the evening the plain was ruddy with light. The foraging expedition of the 3rd corps had succeeded at Colombey ; the 6th corps had captured Ladonchamps. In retaliation, the Prussians set fire to the Château de Mercy, Peltre, Colombey, and Petites-Tapes. The flames lighted up all parts of the horizon. Everyone with oppressed heart was present in thought at this return of the furious enemy, driving out the inoffensive peasants, spreading savage destruction, torch in

hand. Mourgues, however, was triumphing, with an accent which had the savour of garlic.

‘Fine progress we’ve made! All that for a few prisoners, a few beasts. . . .’

However, newspapers seized on the Germans were interesting. Crumpled, stained with filth and blood, they brought, in the ignorance in which they were living, the echo of outside voices: Paris was holding out; bloody combats were fought under its walls; the National Defence was being organized everywhere. Prussia was disposed to treat with Jules Favre, who had just gone to Ferrières, where the enemy’s chief headquarters was established. Du Breuil again fell back into the circle of conjectures, doubts, and fears. Did not everything prove the necessity of war to the bitter end? Were they not deserving of better conditions by fatiguing the invaders? Would they resolve that Lorraine and Alsace, as they very loudly plumed themselves, would remain their prey? What was Bazaine waiting for?

Vague rumours of an attempt to make a sortie in the direction of Thionville were then spread about. Sub-Commissary of Stores Gaffiot received an order to collect two days’ oats for all the horses of the army for October 1st. And Du Breuil heard from Charlys that the Marshal was impatiently awaiting the result of Régnier’s negotiations. Unfortunately, on September 29th, this fine plan, based on the delusions of a boaster, or, worse still, on the manœuvres of a spy, crumbled to the ground. An officer sent by General von Stiehle to parley arrived at the Ban Saint-Martin. He handed the Marshal a letter from Bourbaki, dated from Hastings, and one from Prince Frederick Charles, who was surprised that Bourbaki asked to return to Metz. ‘The General could not, however, be in ignorance of the fact that, if they made no opposition to a political journey, it was well understood he could not return to the fortress during the duration of the siege. Régnier ought to have made known this condition.’

‘Poor Bourbaki! One more of whom the Sphinx had got rid!’ people repeated.

But Du Breuil was thinking, and was more correct in his supposition that Bourbaki had set off confident in the success of his mission, persuaded that everything would immediately be arranged, and had conceived that he would not have to return to Metz. The request he had made to Frederick Charles proved without doubt that he had not been able to

come to an understanding with the Empress, and that he found himself in a false position.

The worst of it was that Bazaine himself had been fooled—and with what art!—by the incomparable Bismarck. A despatch from Ferrières on the same day asked the Marshal this question: Would he accept for the surrender of his army the conditions which M. Régnier might stipulate? Bazaine was obliged to reply to General von Stiehle that he did not know Régnier. Furnished with a pass from Bismarck, this man had called himself the *envoyé* of the Empress without written authorizations—had obtained information as to the conditions under which the Marshal would consent to negotiate a capitulation. ‘I replied to him,’ wrote Bazaine, ‘that the only thing that I could do would be to accept a capitulation with the honours of war; but that I could not include the fort of Metz in the convention.’ Military honour would not permit him to accept other conditions. If Prince Frederick Charles wished for more complete particulars, he offered to send to him General Boyer, his first Aide-de-camp.

‘There, my dear fellow,’ said Charlys, with indignation, ‘that is what Bazaine dares to propose! Capitulation without opposition! . . . Do you know on what this Régnier was so well received? On a simple photograph of the Empress’s house at Hastings—a photograph bearing the signature of the Prince Imperial. He made a confidant of this suspicious individual—told him that we only had enough to eat until October 18th. People won’t believe these things later on, my friend! And he proposes his faithful Boyer, the counsellor of Mexico, Boyer l’Invalide, the preacher of an “honourable captivity,” to give particulars! Come, now! rather to enter into *pourparlers*.’ He added sharply: ‘Strasburg surrendered yesterday after a splendid defence.’

There was a silence. Claspings his hands, which cracked, he said:

‘If we could only say as much! Because I’ve lost all hope of making a sortie!’

CHAPTER III.

VARIOUS preparations, however, seemed to belie it. Was the famous sortie on Thionville going to be executed? They were clearing the railway line, and communication between the two

banks by Longeville was re-established. Hence the great joy of Floppe.

‘They took care two months ago not to destroy the dangerous Novéant and Ars bridges, taking no notice of the earnest entreaties of the inhabitants! . . . On the other hand, the only bridge which they could have retained without danger, since it is under the cannon of the forts, besides being lined by a trench, Bazaine made haste to blow up. Much good that was, since it was afterwards necessary to repair it! . . .’

They conversed about the state of provisions. Sub-Commissary Gaffiot had, on his own application, been relieved of the onerous duties which had been left him on August 17th by Commissary de Préval, who had been sent on a mission to General-Commissary Wolf, and who, like Major Magnan, had not since returned.

The situation was not very brilliant. A fortnight’s supply of bread, and on the 15th nothing to eat but horseflesh! Oats, provender, and leaves were also lacking. They were feeding the animals on crushed rape-cakes and beetroot.

‘To-morrow it will be sabre-blades!’ said Francastel banteringly.

He passed all his time in Metz, returning full of stories and *potins*, which he related with the grimaces of a chattering woman.

‘The people of Metz are so excited that you might imagine you were walking on an ant-hill. Bah! they can draw up petitions and present them to the Marshal. It isn’t that which will prevent him from playing at billiards!’

‘You’re behindhand,’ said Floppe gravely. ‘It is at croquet that his Excellency now deigns to strut about.’

This petition, which expressed in so dignified a fashion the feelings of the Municipal Council and the population, had just been taken to Bazaine by M. Maréchal, the Mayor, an ardent patriot. The Marshal, ordinarily a good, even an affable, man, poured forth his protests. He was exactly of the opinion of his interlocutor: the fate of the town ought to remain distinct from that of the army. He was preoccupied with the question of breaking through the enemy’s lines; the recent small operations foreshadowed more serious ones. On the other hand, he was not covering up the difficulties—no horses to drag the supplies and the *matériel*; a sortie would sacrifice many men, would crowd the already full ambulances and hospitals. . . . The Mayor had to be content with his promises.

In the meantime, they heard nothing but the voice of stout Colonel Jacquemère, who was tortured by irrepressible inflammations. Grumbling and blowing, he gave himself an air of importance, since Laune, worn out by fever, which he had constantly resisted, was keeping to his room. Jacquemère had no doubt about the sortie. The order was again given to lighten the baggage. On October 3rd, two days' biscuit and the last ration of bacon remaining in the magazine were distributed. On the previous day, the Château de Ladonchamps had been captured for the second time by the 6th corps. Two days before, the 4th corps had taken possession of the Billaudel chalet and the village of Lessy.

On October 4th the Marshal convoked to his house, for half-past four in the afternoon, the commanders of the Army Corps, and the heads of the various departments. Du Breuil had gone to see Védel at his bivouac. He never passed the length of the camp of the Du Bareil division, established on the Metz glaxis, without sadness. He contemplated the long white and gray files of little Arab horses, formerly so fiery, now prostrated, lying on their sides, terribly thin. Through habit, they still rose to their feet at meal-times, and, pulling at their halters, neighed and pawed, in vain calling for the nose-bags containing oats or the truss of provender. They gnawed everything which came under their teeth, leather and wood; they ate their manes and their tails, momentarily finding strength to kick and bite; then they lay down again, distress in their glassy eyes, and their long agony recommenced.

An officer of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, who was wearing his grizzled beard *en éventail*, held out his hand to Du Breuil.

'Is the news true?'

It was Lieutenant-Colonel de la Manse. He had aged much. He no longer seemed the same man who, on the morning of August 19th, at the Prefecture, where the imperial staff was buzzing about, had laughingly complained, excited by the long night march, that they had made them come from Saint-Mihiel to Metz in one journey.

'What news?' repeated Du Breuil. . . . Why, it was stated that the Lyons and Nantes armies had totally defeated the Prussians between Étampes and Fontainebleau—that Trochu had completed their rout as far as Épernay. A large number of Prussians were said to have been burnt in the Forest of Sénart, woodmen having lighted the fire with petroleum.

He made a gesture expressive of doubt.

‘So much the worse,’ said La Manse. ‘That would have compromised negotiations. Because they are going to treat for peace?’ he asked ironically. ‘Marshal Canrobert, when receiving the newly-promoted superior officers, told them that the Regent was intervening with the King of Prussia, and that we should leave here with the honours of war! . . . Only that? They are not exacting!’

Jeering, he crushed under his heel a clod of earth. A snail which was there cracked, and spread itself out in a viscous trail.

‘Pugh!’ exclaimed La Manse.

A gust of wind sent to their nostrils the pestilence of the horses’ charnel-house. And the disgust which the hideousness of things inspired in them was nothing compared to that which rose from their souls.

Du Breuil resumed his journey. A splendid setting sun warmed the plain; bunches of yellow leaves waved on the last remaining trees in the pale red light. When at the bivouac, a sergeant pointed out to him Captain Védél’s tent, which was whiter than its neighbours, stretched with more care on a knoll surrounded by ingenious little trenches. Védél was seated on a folding-stool, sewing a button on his great-coat with coarse thread. His strong red hands were lined with scratches.

‘You have fallen?’

‘Among the stones at the Château de Ladonchamps attack.’

He related the affair. His men were rough fellows. What misery when such men were hungry! Many soldiers went without arms to dig up potatoes near the outposts of the enemy, who let them alone. For example, some poor devils of soldiers of the line at the 4th corps, at Lessy, had been the dupes of their cupidity. The Germans had hoisted a white flag, held out beautiful crisp loaves of bread, appetizing pieces of bacon, shouting: ‘Bons Frantsous, camarates, nix capout!’ The Frenchmen—one, then ten, then fifty—had advanced, been harpooned, and kept prisoners.

‘Will you believe it!’ said Védél, indignant. ‘The Prussians call that fishing for information!’

The worst was that some of the famished soldiers allowed themselves to be captured, even deserted. He recalled other tricks of the enemy. Some were funny; for instance, it was found at Ladonchamps that a battery which they had feared in the distance was composed of long stove-pipes mounted on

the fore-part of ploughs. Others were sinister ; for instance, detachments in the midst of the battle raised the butts of their rifles in the air, and, when the French approached without suspicion, brought their weapons to their shoulders and fired. He suspected the Prussians of using explosive bullets ; he asked for loyal warfare.

Hospitable, he obliged his cousin to accept a ' cooler ' in the shape of a gill of brandy-and-water, sweetened with sugar-plums. Du Breuil felt a real pleasure in seeing him move about and speak of the approaching sortie. *He* did not trouble himself about knowing whether Bourbaki was going to return, whether Bazaine was negotiating. He was alone preoccupied with the neatness, the food, and the dress of his company.

' Judin is improving,' he said. ' He will pull through, thanks to that good Mdle. Sorbet. But it is terrible in the ambulances ; almost all those who have been amputated die from diarrhoea or typhus. The gangrene of the hospital carries off the others.'

He looked Du Breuil in the eyes with a fine energetic face.

' It's that way. What can you do ? We must be philosophical. We shall get out of the difficulty. I don't understand those who shout and those who cavil. One settles the matter with politics, the other with plans of campaign. It is so simple to mind one's own business.'

Tranquil, he folded his arms. The skin of his nose was peeling ; there were knots in his beard ; his smartness did not suffer from them. Firm-set in his large boots, he resembled those hardy peasants who are strengthened by privations. He had no needs. With his own money he purchased potatoes for his men, but the subscription in favour of the Metz poor had just emptied his purse. Pooh ! what more did he want than a good cloak, a blanket, and a piece of soap ? He reaccompanied Du Breuil in a brotherly manner halfway on his journey.

' There's Judin invalided at one sweep,' he said. ' One-armed—that is worth the cross ? Should the proposition pass through your hands, you might give it your support ?'

' Well, and yourself ?' said Du Breuil, smiling.

' I ?' Védél became red. ' But there are others before me. Not even the Major, a hard man, in the battalion is decorated !'

' A fine fellow, this Védél !' thought Du Breuil upon entering the Ban Saint-Martin. But he no longer said it in the

same tone as formerly. Instead of his unjust disdain, he felt sympathy, almost admiration.

Restaud was waiting for him, conversing with Gex, Cussac, and other members of the various staffs. The council was still being held.

‘General Coffinières isn’t present,’ said Comte de Cussac, ‘but his ears must be tingling. Depend upon it, he is being talked about.’

The attitude of the Governor of Metz was, in fact, criticised by certain commanders of corps. They stated that, in view of the resources hidden in the town, a few domiciliary visits would have doubled their supplies. His weakness in regard to the newspapers was their second complaint. ‘He is aiming at popularity.’ It must be confessed in this case that he succeeded very badly. The meetings of the council were stormy, full of bitterness and recriminations. Bazaine, they said, looked upon the discord of his lieutenants without displeasure, conversed with them, if need be, in secret, listening to their complaints, encouraging them with perfidious good-nature. As a proof of this at the present time, they told a good story. A German newspaper, which had been found on a prisoner, spoke of some waggons belonging to General Frossard, which were cram full of champagne. A Metz newspaper at once reproduced the article, and the only reply they made to the General’s complaints was that it had been published ‘by order.’

In the midst of laughter, Major Gex turned his keen Israelitish profile towards the Marshal’s villa, and contented himself with smiling.

‘Apropos,’ said Captain de Verdier, of Soleille’s staff, whose long legs made him resemble a wading-bird, ‘you know the poor Wild Boar is progressing very badly?’

‘Blache?’

But Du Breuil on the preceding days had had good news of him. . . . Dysentery, it appeared. . . .

‘Good!’ said Restaud, upon seeing the orderlies stop the horses which they were leading up and down, and the sentries get into position again. ‘The council is over.’

The Marshals appeared—Canrobert, his features animated; Lebœuf discontented, biting his heavy moustache; Ladmirault and Frossard gloomy. What was the news? They questioned each other. Jacquemère, who was on the best of terms with Boyer, chattered. The Marshal had proposed to make a

sortie towards Thionville, the 6th corps and the Guard marching on the left bank of the Moselle, the 4th corps following the heights which dominated the valley, the 3rd and the 2nd corps skirting the left bank. Lebœuf had made strong objections, the rôle assigned to his five divisions appearing to him to be too heavy. The Marshal had replied: 'To leave our lines without fighting is impossible. I have placed before you the plan which appears to me to offer least difficulty; if you don't accept it, kindly point out to me another, which will be discussed in its turn, and we will afterwards carry out what has been decided upon by the council.'

Laune, whom Du Breuil went to salute, and who, thinner, his teeth clenched, was quaking with fever upon his bed, said to him:

'I understand nothing about all these discussions: they say that the Marshal always tries to place upon the shoulders of his subordinates the responsibility which is alone incumbent upon himself. Why doesn't he order? They will obey him.'

He added, and he must have felt very chilled in his solitude to have given way to such an outburst of confidence, so little in accordance with his character:

'The misfortune, my dear fellow, is that many regard the captivity of war as a slight mishap, so great is their desire to preserve the army intact. Interested *arrière-pensées*, political calculations—that is what is our destruction. The hope of concluding with this agent of Bismarck once disappointed, there are our great chiefs asking themselves if they would not do better to rally to the new Government. Yesterday it was the Regency; to-day it is the Republic. Let us save our titles and our positions. Happy are those who, like myself, have nothing to lose!'

Du Breuil left him to go to rest. . . . In the evening he found his bed covered with a large wadded quilt. Mme. Guimbail had heard say that the nights were chilly. She still blushed when she met him on the staircase. He now found her almost pretty, so true is it that a passionate feeling transforms the most displeasing face. If solitude weighed on so many men in the vigour of manhood, who knows, he asked himself, what the thin widow in her demure isolation might feel towards all these military men? By many little services and furtive attentions, she allowed him to guess her predilection. Restaud had even joked him about it. Frisch exploited her good dispositions to his own profit, getting himself coddled in the kitchen.

The next morning the hope of a departure was confirmed. All the army ambulances were evacuated on to the town, and sickly men were sent into the fort. The batteries, owing to want of horses, were reduced to four guns; in the cavalry they were hardly able to form a squadron per regiment. A letter from General Coffinières, carried by Captain Chagres, at the same time asked the Marshal to increase the effective of the garrison to twenty-nine thousand men. Bazaine pointed out to the General that on August 14th he was contented with eighteen thousand men. Nevertheless, the Laveaucoupet division would be increased by small reserve companies and five thousand dismounted horsemen. Metz would maintain, therefore, more than twenty-five thousand regulars.

Floppe was teasing Captain Chagres; he had a good opportunity. A recent misadventure of the Governor had enlivened the general staff. Had not Coffinières bethought himself of writing a long letter of adhesion to the Provisional Government, and of entrusting it to the balloon which each day carried the correspondence written on foreign note-paper? This letter described the situation of the town, the state of opinion, and contained bitter complaints against Bazaine. The balloon had fallen into the hands of the Prussians, and Prince Frederick Charles had just given himself the malicious pleasure of sending back the compromising missive to the Marshal, underlined with red pencil. Bazaine was not concerned; he had even affected to joke about the bad character of General Coffinières.

'So, Chagres, you are converted to the Republic?' jeered Floppe.

Chagres, a plain man with a mouth like that of a sleeping ox, replied:

'My friend, I don't care a damn for the Republic!'

'But, Chagres, will the town hold out long, once you are alone?'

'My friend, I don't care a damn for the town,' replied the stout man with indifference. 'I don't care a damn for Bismarck, I don't care a damn for Bazaine, I don't care a damn even for you, if you must know it.'

However, the sortie remained in suspense. Lebœuf insisted on the difficulty of debouching with only his troops, and asked that the Guard be added. Nevertheless, during the day each one thought they were going to set off. Many faces beamed. In the evening they made a special distribution of two days'

oats and hay to the horses. Horsemen, through affection, gorged their horses, which died. Officers that night slept in their clothes, waiting in the cold night for the order which did not come. Du Breuil went to sleep late, dreaming that Mme. Guimbail—no, it was Rose Noël—no, the auburn-haired girl in the glove-shop—noiselessly entered and bent over his bedhead.

In the morning he was sent to Lessy, with the mission to assure himself if the 4th corps were ready. Upon returning he found a singular change. Strange news!—Lebœuf had just been ordered to make an operation on Courcelles-sur-Nied.

‘That isn’t the way to Thionville!’ fumed Floppe.

But the most astonishing thing was the letter which Coffinières had just written to the Marshal. He reproached him with abandoning Metz, after having exhausted its supplies; he affirmed that the town could not resist without the army; he foresaw fifteen thousand new wounded in consequence of the fight, crowding the ambulances, which were already filled by twenty thousand sick men. This sortie was, at short notice, the fall of the town and the loss of Lorraine. He threw the responsibility of events upon the Marshal, and in advance called upon the judgment of posterity.

‘Do you know,’ repeated Charlys, with exasperation, ‘it is the third time that he has insisted upon keeping us here, knowing well, however, that only the resources of the town can feed us, since our magazines are empty. Does he hope that the presence of Bazaine will free him from responsibility, and will cover his faults?’ He added: ‘The Marshal has a conference this afternoon with the Governor of Metz and the General Commander of Artillery. A bad sign. Recollect the morning of Grimont. These gentlemen will give excellent reasons for remaining quiet.’

He was right. The order to *boucan* horses, for they were unable to prepare preserved meat, owing to want of salt, showed almost immediately an intention of stopping.

‘Not astonishing,’ Francastel was saying. ‘A *fænrîch* prisoner has just stated that the enemy knows of our projects, and is preparing to receive us five against one. Forsooth, the Marshal reflected!’

Mourgues, exuberant, attributed this fluctuation to news learnt that very morning from the newspapers seized on the prisoners, namely, that the armistice was being negotiated; that they had communicated to Jules Favre the conditions imposed by the King of Prussia, and they were awaiting in

the evening at Ferrières the reply of the Government of the National Defence.

Mourgues added :

‘Fort Montretout is in the hands of the Prussians. Masters of the heights which dominate Paris, they can bombard it at their ease. The terrified Parisians’—he rolled the *r*’s—‘will force the Government to submit. Therefore, why venture upon a fight? Let us wait. Everything will come right.’

‘Wait!’ repeated Charlys. ‘Wait until we have eaten our last crust? Wait until our weapons fall from our hands through weakness? Because *you* don’t grow thin’—Mourgues was stout—‘cannot you see the exhaustion of the soldiers, how wan, pale, debilitated they are? Nevertheless, it pricks one’s heart!’

‘It is precisely with the object of filling our magazines,’ said D’Homolle, another of the Marshal’s officers, ‘that Lebœuf has received the order to capture the large stores at Courcelles-sur-Nied.’

Only one thing prevented that being done—Lebœuf explained on the following day that he considered the operation impossible. Bazaine did not insist, and ordered Canrobert to carry out a foraging expedition on the farms of Grandes and Petites Tapes, on Bellevue and Saint-Rémy. The Voltigeurs of the Guard would support the operation. The 3rd and the 4th corps would make a diversion on their side. The attack was to commence at eleven o’clock. But the troops, in consequence of the late transmission of orders, only formed into line about one o’clock. In the evening Restaud, sent to the field of action, brought back news :

‘The 3rd and the 4th corps engaged feebly, the 6th with ardour. Boisjol, under the Marshal’s eyes, headed the Voltigeurs of the Guard with superb bravery. I met a German officer who had been taken prisoner. Some soldiers near me jeered. But he drew himself up, and said : “It isn’t well to laugh.” And, looking at me : “Don’t be so proud. Your turn is coming !”’ Restaud added : ‘Unfortunately the foraging expedition under the enemy’s violent fire could not be executed. The troops return in good order.’

The bulletin was known. It was always the same. So that nothing should change, the two Tapes fired by the Prussians blazed out in the evening. And one thousand two hundred and fifty wounded went to swell the ambulances, where the soldiers no longer got better—where they died.

There was an overcast sky, cold weather, and rain, on the morning of the 8th. Frisch, who was lighting a small fire in the fireplace, asked :

‘Do you recollect, sir, the townspeople at whose house you slept at Moulins, on the evening of the battle of Borny?’

The Poirets? Yes, they were the people—the old, busy couple, with anguish in their eyes, with feeble, shrill voices. Poiret? The worthy man whom they had met at the turning off of the Moulins-lès-Metz road, a few days after Saint-Privat? Well?

‘He would like to speak to you, sir. He told Mme. Guimbail that it was a great secret.’

Du Breuil went downstairs to his landlady’s. A fur cap between his fingers, the old man was compressing his lips, his eyelids low, full of importance.

‘Major,’ he said, ‘although you have not recognised me, I have met you often since the evening of Borny. I have come to open my heart to you, because your face inspires me with confidence. Listen, then!’ He lowered his voice, looking around him. ‘Your Marshal betrays all of us! I have seen him go to the Prussians!’

‘M. Poiret, a man of your age. . . .’

The old man continued with energy:

‘A man of my age, Major, knows what he says when he has seen. It was on September 26th, a Monday evening. I was taking a bottle of brandy to the francs-tireurs of Ars to give them a drop. I must tell you I have a cousin among them. I stopped at the end of the bridge. I heard some horses arriving, and I saw Marshal Bazaine pass with an artillery trumpeter and a chasseur or a hussar, who was carrying a white flag. A little later they returned alone. I said to them, “What, you return alone?” They answered, “Yes, we have received the order to return to the Ban Saint-Martin.” I even gave a pinch of snuff to the trumpeter. Where had Bazaine gone, then? To the Prussians, sir!’

He spoke with a great air of sincerity. The disquieted face of Mme. Guimbail appeared through the half-open door.

‘Was it really the Marshal?’ said Du Breuil.

‘Yes, yes; it was he with his white hair and his red horse. I know him well. A few days before he spoke to me at Moulins, and, turning towards M. Arnous-Rivière, he then ordered him to have the cabarets closed at nine o’clock, and to forbid anyone to walk about in the streets!’

Du Breuil remaining incredulous, he grew warm :

‘If I were the only one! But a Moulins carpenter—his name is Paquin—has twice recognised the Marshal going towards the Ars lines, and has seen him enter the Prussian lines. I am a quiet old man. What interest should I have in coming to tell you this to bring upon myself trouble? I tell you, and I repeat it to you. . . .’

He solemnly stretched out his hand :

‘Bazaine goes to plot with the enemy!’

Du Breuil, in order to calm the increasing excitement of the old man, tried to convince him that he was mistaken, and not without difficulty he sent him away, advising him to keep silence.

‘It is too much,’ he said to himself when alone. ‘It is impossible!’

He thought about it all day. On the following day a lugubrious duty fell to his lot. He went to the army cemetery on the Île Chambière to assure himself that it was impossible to give up the body of a Lieutenant of the Oldenburg Dragoons who had died in hospital, and who was earnestly claimed by his family. He contemplated the covered tomb where, in all probability, the guardian explained to him, the Prussian officer was at rest in the midst of two thousand bodies of both nations, buried eight high. Not far away a yawning trench awaited new hecatombs. Twenty-four corpses, in shrouds open to the air, were stretched at the bottom side by side, some showing an arm, some a head. There was something terrifying about their immobility. They received the rain with a death-like stiffness, the ludicrousness of which was chilling. At the corner of the trench some soil was falling down with an insensible slipping motion. The guardian, a man with a sparse beard and very pale blue eyes, which were no longer astonished at anything, was smoking his pipe.

‘At first,’ he said, ‘they chucked them in by cartfuls, stark naked, *en salade*.’

Du Breuil then crossed the bivouac of the Lancers of the Guard. In the mud and under the downpour of rain large raw-boned horses, without mane or tail, their coats stripped off and showing the skin, stood upright on their spider legs or lay down in the puddles. Here and there was stretched out a dead animal, the ears of which its neighbours were eating. A horse with mad eyes rushed upon Du Breuil, its ears lying flat and its teeth protruding. No one to look after these animals

in their resigned or furious agony ! Under the flooded tents the Lancers were killing their disgust for life, wallowing in sleep ; or else, their eyes open in a torpor of alcohol and tobacco, dreaming of their native place, of peace, of rest since they did not want to lead them to the fight. The yawning of one of them, a fair giant, exhaled, from the opening of a red jaw, the grunting of a wild animal.

The recollection of Lacoste was then poignant. How he would have suffered to see that ! . . . Du Breuil perceived two Lancers crouching near a stretched-out mare, so empty that its ribs pierced its skin. One was that man of the Guard who, carrying the lantern, had conducted him through the Saint-Cloud barracks at Lacoste's, he who had lighted them on their round ; the other was old Saint-Paul. The latter was placing a handful of straw between the teeth of the animal. But without having the strength to masticate it, she breathed quickly, jerkingly—a series of little breaths which seemed to make the supreme shudders, the last ripples of life, pass over her miserable carcase.

‘ There is nothing to be done,’ said the quartermaster. ‘ Take that to my old Clairon.’ And Du Breuil saw this rough man bend over the mare to kiss her hollow nostrils with inefficient and discouraged tenderness. ‘ Farewell, Musette,’ he said in a harsh voice.

Musette ! an acute and atrocious pain passed through Du Breuil. How recognise, in this long, living corpse, the elegant animal with shining coat which, awakened from a doze in its box at Saint-Cloud, had neighed at its master—the pawing mare which, on the day of the departure of the Guard for Boulay, left the Hôtel de l'Europe at a slow trot, while Titan, with heavy bounds, leapt around her ? Musette, whom Lacoste had so much loved—was this poor dying animal, these remains for the grave, Musette ?

Three steps away Gouju was stroking an old troop-horse, all muscles and nerves, a veritable anatomical piece. It was masticating the straw with its yellow teeth. Saint-Paul approached, and, looking at it with fixed, dry eyes, seemed to centre on it all his affection. Gouju, moved, turned away his head.

‘ Quartermaster !’ called Du Breuil.

Saint-Paul looked at him and saw a discomposed face. Their souls, so different, so far apart, brought nearer together by a common pity, notwithstanding difference of rank and

station, fraternized. Du Breuil, in an impulse in which his sympathy and his gratitude tried to express itself, stretched out his hand to the veteran. Saint-Paul hesitated, reddened, took his hand. It was a long, silent clasping of hands between the officer and the soldier. Upon lowering his eyes, Du Breuil noticed Saint-Paul's wounded foot.

‘You still suffer?’

Gouju dared to intervene:

‘He doesn’t want to go to the ambulance.’

‘I don’t want to die from gangrene,’ said the other.

In a couple of words he explained his very simple remedy: he placed brandy on the wound; then, every now and then, he removed the rotten flesh with his knife, just as one hollows out rotten fruit.

Du Breuil sought for some kind words, a method of obliging, of helping the veteran. He feared to hurt his feelings, smiled sadly, and, touching his képi, said:

‘To better times!’

Saint-Paul, stiff, his hand at his foraging-cap, saluted. Discipline had re-established the barrier.

Du Breuil re-entered the town.

‘Major!’ said a voice. M. Dumaine, still stout and ruddy, but pitiable in the rain, having the air of a disquieted, prowling dog, fastened himself on to him, and, rolling his eyes, asked: ‘Is it true that Bourbaki is in prison at the École d’Application? They affirm that he wished to make a sortie at all costs, and that he told Bazaine so. Others repeat that the Marshal is keeping him in his house at the Ban Saint-Martin with levelled guns, for fear they come to rescue him.’

Du Breuil tried to get rid of the stout man.

‘Really, you assure me that Bourbaki left with this Régnier?’ repeated Dumaine. ‘But it is so improbable! Very few people believe it. Just now, again, some soldiers pretended that he had boxed Bazaine’s ears, and that the Marshal, having killed him in a duel, had buried him in his park.’

Du Breuil spoke of the Bersheims, to change the conversation. Dumaine, ill at ease, eluded the question; he had not seen them for some time—he had been ill. His look and his honeyed voice showed he was lying. He made off.

Du Breuil had promised to obtain news of Blache at the École Saint-Clément. He came across Décherac, still pale, who was accompanying Mme. de Fontades. They were leaving a confectioner’s, where, eating mirabelles, they had

waited until the rain stopped. Mme. de Fontades was wearing in her corsage a bouquet of autumn roses, delicate as the paleness of her complexion. Her eyelids were 'killing'; she had the grace of a sweetheart. Her attitude showed she had captured Décherac, who appeared delighted. He was going to resume his duties in a few days, he announced. He was taking the air—he smiled at his friend—by order of the doctor. He added :

'Metz is mournful ! One meets nothing but lame men and men with crutches. The day before yesterday, in the fine weather, it was a veritable defile of invalids.'

Mme. de Fontades smelt her roses. From all the streets, houses, and pavements transuded, in the damp air, a musty smell of phenol and chlorine, which did not succeed in hiding the terrible stench of purulent sores and decomposed flesh. Décherac, who had a great esteem for Blache, insisted upon accompanying Du Breuil. All three walked in a row, Mme. de Fontades, from whose umbrella the rain dripped down their necks, in the middle.

'Father Desroques ?'

A Jesuit father informed them that he was very ill ; his devotion had exhausted him. 'A torch which is going to extinguish,' a doctor had told him.

'Major Blache ?'

The Father made a gesture of powerlessness.

'An operation which had succeeded so well ! . . . every sign of recovery . . . and then, from one day to the other, dysentery. . . . There was no hope.'

With light steps the two officers and Mme. de Fontades—the Father cast an anxious look at her—advanced into the dormitory. Their attention was attracted by a wounded man, who was so big that his head and feet almost projected from the bed. A wicker framework raised the sheets above him in the form of a rainbow, so that they should not touch him. In consequence he appeared gigantic. His red, swollen face turned towards them ; his enormous moustache was turned back ; his eyes were starting from his head ; he mumbled an incoherent phrase.

'He has remained afflicted in his mind,' said the Father, in a low voice. Then, with naïve admiration, 'What a pity ! Such a splendid man !'

The Father was very small, very shrivelled, so weak that a fillip would have overturned him. Down there, that stiff form,

that cadaverous face, the skin of which, too large, hung down, that wasted body, reduced to nothing, was Blache. His lustreless eyes did not recognise them.

‘Blache, it is us—Du Breuil, Décherac, your friends!’

Not a movement. The Wild Boar’s protruding teeth, which were snarlingly shown, reminded one of the teeth of an animal at bay, which is about to die.

A poignant emotion seized Du Breuil, and even the frivolous Décherac was touched. Again he saw Blache, untiring at his work, impassible when under fire, devoted to his master, Marshal Lebœuf, like those growling dogs which are the most faithful. There were few men of this stamp. Was it not a stupid irony, a revolting cruelty on the part of fate, that this old soldier should have escaped bullets, shells, the point of sabres and bayonets, should have ridden from battle-fields in flames by miraculous chances, to come, miserable and solitary, to agonize in this hospital bed, drained by a fœtid death in the midst of the most abject pollution?’

‘Blache, don’t you recognise me? It is I—Du Breuil!’

There was a painful silence. The cadaverous face remained rigid, yet Blache saw and heard them. Du Breuil stretched out his hand to take that of his old comrade, which was hanging down on the bedclothes; but with savage reserve he withdrew it. What things were expressed by such a motion! What humiliation! What reproach! ‘Let me die! Why contemplate my misery?’ Blache seemed to say.

Du Breuil, Décherac, and Mme. de Fontades consulted together by looks. The silence was so intense that they were stifled; they felt ashamed, as though they had involuntarily insulted that which suffering and death holds most sacred. Mme. de Fontades took the bouquet of roses from her corsage, and, having kissed it, placed it by a pious inspiration on the bed, against the Wild Boar’s breast. Something indefinable appeared on Blache’s face. With trembling fingers he took the roses, slowly and with precaution, smelt them, and this man, who had looked Death in the face, and who feared nothing, turned towards the wall and wept.

Du Breuil and Décherac now went away on tip-toe, Mme. de Fontades following them with agitated face.

When going out, the umbrella of a very fashionably-dressed gentleman knocked up against Du Breuil’s hood.

‘Maxime!’

The thin face lit up; Judin, his right arm in a sling, smiled.

His umbrella hindered him from saluting. His infirmity caused him more annoyance than physical pain. Especially before the young lady, to whom he was introduced, his humiliation was visible. Mme. de Fontades gave a little cry.

‘Vicomte Judin! He was a relative of——’

He was, in fact, related by marriage to one of her aunts, and consequently was a kind of cousin to her. She quickly invited him to dinner, delighted to find in him a man of her society, of her tastes. So that Décherac should not be jealous, she prettily pressed his arm.

‘There are, then, fashionable tailors in Metz?’ Du Breuil asked.

In his tight-fitting frock-coat, pearl-gray trousers, white gaiters, and patent-leather shoes, Du Breuil found once more his Judin, the Judin of the club, of the pleasure-parties with Bloomfield, Lapoigne, and Peyrode, the Judin of the times which appeared to him so far, so far away. . . .

‘Parbleu!’ said Judin. ‘I have the tailor of the Marshal and General Boyer. These gentlemen have just had plain clothes made. You see how informed I am. Boyer even said to this man who was taking his measure: “If I must file past the Prussians, I don’t want it to be in uniform.” Textual! As for me, I’ve handed over my cloak and red trousers. Invalided! But, don’t you know, had it not been for the devotion of Mdlle. Sorbet, I should have died!’

Mme. de Fontades was puzzled, scented the romantic, and asked for details. Was this lady Sorbet young and pretty? . . . But why remain in the street to receive the rain? Why not all three come home with her? Her husband would be charmed. . . . Du Breuil excused himself, and Judin wanted to see him home. They parted. Décherac, led away by his pretty nurse, cried:

‘Bonjour à Restaud.’

When they were alone Du Breuil and Judin, joyful at again finding one another, looked at each other; then their smile slowly faded, and gave place to the disquietude and anxiety of the present.

‘Well, my poor Pierre?’

Du Breuil did not reply.

Judin continued:

‘I now live at the Hôtel du Nord. A number of officers meet at the club. There is nothing but a hue and cry against

Bazaine. Perhaps down there at the Ban Saint-Martin you haven't an idea of the agitation in Metz.'

'Possibly,' said Du Breuil. 'But what does it amount to? Wind!'

'Hum!' said Judin. 'When the wind commences to blow a tempest! So much indignation may well result in a general revolt. What is the obstacle to the will of the town and the whole army? A single man—Bazaine.'

'Well,' replied Du Breuil, 'will you put him aside? How?'

The thing seemed to him absurd, inconceivable. Were they going to suppress the Marshal? By what means?—violence? It was foolish: they could not go beyond the law without committing a crime. Persuasion? Obtain his resignation as Commander-in-Chief, get him to give up his position to another? Was that probable?

'Is there no hope of convincing him?' ventured Judin. 'If one appealed to his honour, to his patriotism, and if he remained blind to his interest, to the feeling of responsibility which he is incurring? France would ask him for the reason of his inaction, and of his *pourparlers* with the enemy!'

'Ah! who will convince him?' said Du Breuil, out of patience. 'Who will speak louder than his incognizance, than his ambition, than his egoism? He has neither equals nor master.'

'However,' opposed Judin, 'it is unheard of, that two hundred thousand men are dependent on the folly or the treason of one man. Here is Bazaine now consulting the Generals of Division, asking them for their opinion on the situation, as though he didn't yet feel himself sufficiently screened by the complicity of the commanders of the corps. I was dining the day before yesterday with General Chenot, when he received a message from Canrobert, asking him to go and confer with him. He made a singular face, and murmured: "Just so; we are called *in extremis* to pronounce the absolution!"'

'I know. The meeting was held yesterday at the quarters of the commanders of the corps. Most of the Generals, if I judge by a few who have not kept their opinions secret, have admitted the possibility of a military convention in accordance with which the army would be allowed to retire with arms and baggage to a neutral point of the territory. If not, they declare themselves ready to die at the head of their troops. All that is mere talk, Maxime! The enemy cannot, will not,

grant us a capitulation other than that of Sedan. It amuses us, famine comes, and when we wish to die fighting it will be too late. There you are !'

'Then, how is it going to end ?' asked Judin.

'Badly,' concluded Du Breuil. 'Bless your stars you're invalided. You are doubtless spared captivity in Germany.'

Judin suddenly became purple and protested :

'No, no, Pierre ; don't say such things. It is impossible !'

He was thinking, 'It is shameful !' But within himself there rang out the secret voice which, louder than the sound at reveille, or that to extinguish fires, was crying to each one, morning and night, the fatal prophecy without succeeding in shaking off the stupor of that crowd of men, fascinated, it seemed, by the inexorable approach of its fate.

'Look !' he said.

Behind the dripping windows of a café some officers were wildly gesticulating and speaking in a high tone of voice. Du Breuil recognised two well-known figures—Colonel la Maisonval and Captain Laprune—Orestes and Pylades. They were playing a game of *écarté* ; one could see from the manner in which they were playing that these cards were more familiar than geographical maps. 'Isn't this the Rhine which passes Sarrelouis ?'—'I beg your pardon, Colonel, it is the Moselle !'

'From my armchair in Mdlle. Sorbet's drawing-room,' said Judin, 'I saw them pass before the window every day at the same hour going to the café, the Captain supporting his lame Colonel. Shall we go in ?'

'No, thanks,' said Du Breuil.

The night was falling quickly. He entered the chief headquarters soaked to the skin.

'Do you know,' said Francastel, 'that after to-morrow they will give the horses nothing more to eat ? In five days no more bread ! In eleven days ! . . .'

He made his finger-nail crack on his tooth.

And there arose before Du Breuil a vision of the enormous beast with two hundred thousand mouths. Tormented by a voracious and regular need for sustenance, it had swallowed during two months mountains of provisions, dried up rivers of wine, whole harvests ; innumerable sacks of corn had been eaten ; flocks had been devoured by hundreds. He was haunted by the image of famished soldiers. Some were eating with greedy loathing the badly cooked horseflesh, cut off from the

carcase immediately before; others were tearing pieces of bread. All, in their pallid thinness, prostrated or febrile, had features which were drawn and bestial. Those who could get provisions were seized with a savage egoism, and hid themselves to eat. All bonds were broken. Officers and soldiers no longer dared to look each other in the face. Each one became a savage. Alone the hours when food was distributed still brought together this unsatiated crowd. But soon, when the last horses, dead from starvation, had served for food, what was to become of them, what had they to hope?

CHAPTER IV.

ON the 10th, in the incessant rain which transformed the Ban Saint-Martin into a lake, the mud splashed up under the wheels of vehicles and the hoofs of horses. The commanders of the corps and the heads of departments were arriving, and under the presidency of the Marshal was held the supreme council, whence, according to his own terms, the definite solution of the situation of the army was to issue. It lasted an interminable time. Was it going to result in a desperate but glorious inspiration, or that eternal submission, that sad resignation to circumstances? General Jarras, who was present at it, but, as upon every occasion, without deliberative voice, appeared. Generals and Colonels Charlys and Jacquemère anxiously surrounded him. A large number of officers of all ranks, and belonging to all branches of the army, pressed forward for news. Du Breuil then heard a report of the meeting.

They had been divided in opinions, throwing responsibilities in each other's faces. Coffinières, accused of making peace with the political opposition which was fermenting in Metz, called upon to order fresh requisitions in the town, and to suppress the license of too patriotic and too republican newspapers, at the mercy of the council, had justified his conduct and put forward the grievances of Metz. They had decided, in presence of his insistence, to leave at the fort provisions necessary for its defence in case the army should move away.

Passing to the military question, the necessity of immediately leaving had been recognised. All the reports of the commanders of army corps concluded either for an honourable capitulation or for a vigorous sortie *en masse*. The Marshal had shown the impossibility of the latter course. A political expedient was,

therefore, the only thing which remained. By addressing the King of Prussia, in the name of order and peace, perhaps they would find him disposed to utilize the Army of the Rhine for the establishment or the maintenance of a stable power: the Empire, everyone understood, and, if not, the actual Government established at Paris and at Tours or another. . . Coffinières—and he must be praised for it—had then protested:

‘It was not admissible that the Prussians would allow us to return to France to establish order; those overtures would only result in our dragging on until the exhausting of our feeble resources. Would it not be better first to try the fate of arms? They would negotiate afterwards if misfortune willed that they were reduced to negotiating.’

But the majority were of the contrary opinion; first of all *pourparlers*, and if the enemy’s conditions were incompatible with military honour, they would then try to make a way out by force. Feeling that it was a case of urgency, Ladmirault had asked that negotiations be commenced in less than forty-eight hours. General Boyer had been appointed on the spot to proceed to the King of Prussia at Versailles.

‘It is disastrous, disastrous!’ repeated Jacquemère.

On the previous day, after hearing the confidences of Boyer, he leaned towards an accord with the enemy. His opinions were changed by the last influence which acted upon him.

When Laune knew the decision of the council, a great shudder passed over him, his complexion turned green under a flow of bile. However, he straightened himself up. What was the good of pouring one’s self forth in words? Discipline stifled revolt. The bitter consciousness which he had of the situation lighted him to his duty—to serve without swerving, with the straightness of a steel instrument.

But Charlys cried:

‘What responsibility they will bear before history! They think to save the army and rest on a rotten plank which cracks under their feet. They will drown themselves, and we shall all drown with them—yes, drown in this mud!’

With a gesture he indicated the slimy slough which stretched out under the window, the cloacæ of the camps, Metz under the muddy water of its river, under the deluge.

‘Gentlemen,’ Floppe was saying after dinner, ‘I have a sad piece of news: our eminent chief, Colonel Laune, has the jaundice. As to Colonel Charlys, he appears to me to have the air of a conspirator. Bazaine has only to hold his ground well!’

On the 11th the weather cleared up. Du Breuil went out, as much to escape from himself as to flee from his little bedroom, his comrades, and the Marshal's closed house. The Ban Saint-Martin had become odious to him. He went to Metz. The coming and going would deceive his sick heart, his tortured spirit. He would call at the Bersheims'. Why had he fled from this hospitable house? What wretched disgrace withheld him, alternately repelled and attracted? On the one hand it was D'Avol, their misunderstanding increasing. It would be painful to him again to see the friend through whom he had suffered, was still suffering. But, on the other hand, it was Anine. She invited him by the expressive grace of her silence, the serious charm of her smile. He saw her always so dignified, so proud—such as she had appeared to him in the passage after D'Avol's perfidious allusions to Mme. de Guëonic.

He asked himself what this immured young girl, mistress of her emotions, possessed of so sure a tact, of so even a disposition, thought and felt. More and more she seemed to him one of those balanced souls of Lorraine, a true daughter of Metz-la-Pucelle. At times he confounded her with the city, the placid pride, the inviolate prestige of which she incarnated. When he heard the indignant complaints of the people of Metz trembling that their town might be the price of peace, it was of Anine that he thought. Metz in the hands of the enemy, Metz Prussian!—it was Anine that he imagined with a feeling of terrible anguish, of jealous hatred. He recalled his adieu on the morning of Borny, and what he had then felt which was inexpressible. He recalled since then all the obscure working of his thought, invisible, intangible, that which one neither pronounces nor confesses. At the very name of Anine he became sad; he felt nothing bitter, but something serious and agitated, which descended into the depths of his being. Then he braced himself up and shut himself up in so penetrating an emotion that it became painful. For days afterwards he avoided the remembrance with mistrustful reserve, as though he feared to profane it.

Upon reaching the Porte de France, a very ruddy, white-haired doctor who was coming out—hallo! it was Père Riscard—swooped down upon him, waving his stick with his abruptness of an old punchinello, the hump of which he only lacked.

'Splendid news, friend! Go to Metz! Everything is topsy-turvy!'

Without wishing to say anything more he skipped away. On the Pont des Morts an officer of the Zouaves of the Guard, who was going at full speed, stopped quite out of breath to cry :

‘Saved, Major—saved! And it is the rabble which has come to our assistance. They are *voyous* who deliver us!’

‘What rabble? What *voyous*?’

‘The population of Paris has risen *en masse* and has crushed the Prussians. There is a despatch. Where is it? I’m in search of it. But at the Ban Saint-Martin, Major, you must have seen it?’

He continued on his way. Passers-by questioned Du Breuil, groups of people murmured at all the corners of the streets. Women spoke with abrupt volubility. A large number of people—soldiers and inhabitants of Metz—were formed in a circle round a corporal of the line.

‘The despatch!’ they cried to him. ‘Read!’

Du Breuil elbowed his way into the crowd.

‘I copied it,’ said the corporal, excited by the importance which he was assuming, ‘from a piece of paper held by an officer, who himself had copied it, I know not where.’

‘Read! read!’ cried the crowd.

The corporal read :

‘Three victories before Paris. One hundred and eighty thousand men *hors de combat*. Prussian army in retreat on Châlons. Francs-tireurs of the Vosges and Franche-Comté have recaptured Lunéville. They march on Nancy. Let Metz hold its ground!’

‘(Signed) BAZAINE.’

There was a burst of cheers, bravos, and cries. Divided between absurd hope and passionate incredulity, Du Breuil had turned round to look at the feverish faces, agitated with expectation, curiosity, and blind faith. The least expressive—those, even, that were ossified by old age—were all expressive of passionate souls, and some bordered on frenzy and madness. The exaltation of the town, which increased the more he proceeded on his way, was painful to him. Everywhere were gesticulating National Guards under arms. This bubbling froth on the fire would fall flat as soon as the cold truth was known.

After being stopped ten times, forced to reply to questions, he reached Bersheim’s residence. Little Thibaut, pale and

thin—where were his cheeks rosy as an apple?—was playing with some tadpoles which were swarming in a large tub. Barrels near called to mind the threat of bombardment on September 16th, the precautions which had been taken; the water in them had stagnated, had become the colour of a dead leaf.

‘Bonjour, m’sieur!’ The youngster made the military salute. ‘My little sister is very ill.’

‘Don’t bother the gentleman!’

Louise, enormous and near her confinement, rushed out of the laundry. Du Breuil questioned her. Alas! yes, her little daughter had a violent fever. ‘It is this offensive air. A child, too, who was so healthy at the farm!’ Three wet-nurses were dead in the neighbouring houses. . . . No more milk or baker’s bread! One met many little coffins in the streets. Everywhere were black dresses and closed shops with the notice ‘Pour cause de décès’ stuck on the shutters. And to think that the Prussians, nice and warm, were stuffing themselves with *saucine aux poix* behind their shelters. ‘I have seen some prisoners, sir. It is disgusting! How fat they are!’

A fit of sobbing suffocated her. She returned into her laundry.

In the meantime old Lisbeth, with exclamations, was introducing Du Breuil. ‘Had he, then, been ill that they saw him no more? It was true the house was not lively. He would find the ambulance half empty, but not because the patients were cured—Lord!’ The old Captain, that brave fellow who was so resigned; the corporal wounded at Noisseville, who had seen Louise’s mother and father, the old Larrouys, killed in their farm; the other, a little Lieutenant who resembled a girl—may the good God receive their souls! they had suffered much.

One after the other, Grandmother Sophia, Mme. Bersheim, and Anine, came into the drawing-room. All three associated, united in their devotion, and by their ministration of charity, looked at him with such a similar expression of face that he was struck by it. He was moved to see to what a degree sorrow had made them identical. The joy of Maurice’s return had more quickly passed away than the sorrow of having lost André, and all these deaths in their house, all these signs of anguish in the streets, in the quarter, in the town, in the camps, had filled them with horror. Their dry eyes seemed incapable of shedding more tears. While in the case of

Grandmother Sophia her features retained a look of admirable good-nature, one read in the beautiful clear eyes of Mme. Bersheim a revolt which religion could not assuage. Sudden emotion had transfigured Anine. She only gave Du Breuil one look, but it was eloquent; and he retained from the brief clasp of their hands an expression of rapture, confidence; the joy which he felt from it was grave and manly. The three women in mourning still looked at him, appeared to wait, to hope for a word of hope from him, an energetic act, no matter what, to ease the tragic destiny which was crushing them all. He felt his powerlessness cruelly.

‘How is Maurice?’

‘They have—what do you call it?—reincorporated him,’ said Mme. Bersheim, ‘in a regiment of the line in camp at Sablon. He is on duty. You won’t see him to-day.’

‘And D’Avol?’ he asked.

‘Almost cured. He rejoins his regiment to-morrow,’ said the grandmother.

Silence, as heavy as a reproach, again reigned. Loud voices in discussion came from the garden.

‘You will find many of your comrades with my husband,’ continued Mme. Bersheim. ‘They are holding a great meeting.’

‘You will not be one too many there, if it is only to counsel calmness and judgment,’ said Anine.

She pulled up a blind, pushed open the window. Du Breuil saw a stormy gathering; disquieted and cordial faces turned towards him. The discussion continued just as high and as loud. He shook people by the hands. D’Avol pretended not to see him—perhaps he was really absorbed by his conversation with Gex—he let go his hand as though he were an indifferent person, then in astonishment said:

‘Hullo, Pierre! You are, then, of our number? In your absence we have sown.’

He turned towards Gex:

‘Changarnier is too old. Canrobert alone is our man. Do you think he will consent?’

Gex, who was prudent, and who had come there to see which way the wind was blowing, replied:

‘Rest assured that Bazaine will resign in favour of nobody. In consequence, acceptance on the part of Canrobert appears to me impossible. His loyalty, his chivalrous character, his respect for discipline, will not suffer any false situation.’

Comte de Cussac approached. D'Avol sounded him about Ladmirault, and received the same reply. However, notwithstanding Barrus' interruptions, Carrouge was railing against the Provisional Government.

'It is shameful,' the old Commander of the Imperial Guard was saying, 'shameful, that these men of September 4th should choose the time at which the enemy crowds native territory to make a revolution!'

Barrus, his eyes ablaze, his voice ringing, protested:

'The sword of France was lying in the mud. These men have picked it up to strike the enemy. No one has overthrown the Empire. It has fallen of itself, like a thing which is rotten.'

'You speak like a demagogue!' cried Carrouge.

'I speak as a patriot. All France has pronounced against it; we alone still recognise it.'

Carrouge declared:

'We are bound by our oath!'

'Our oath to whom? To an Emperor who is prisoner? To an Empress in flight? Are we the soldiers of a man or of a country? Where is France—at Wilhemshöhe? at Hastings?'

'Barrus is right,' intervened Bersheim. 'If there is no longer an Empire, the country remains! How does the Marshal's oath prevent him from carrying out his military duties? Whatever their political opinions may be, soldiers should only have one idea, that of leaving Metz, and avoid by all means the shameful capitulation which is being prepared.'

It was to this point, with his obstinate good sense, that he brought the discussion, ever ready to wander at the mercy of sterile recriminations.

'We are agreed upon that,' growled Carrouge. 'We must make a way out at all costs!'

'Let us be practical,' cried an enthusiastic carabineer. 'Those who wish to force Bazaine hold up their hands.'

'I beg your pardon,' said another—slim Captain de Serres, of D'Avol's battery—'not the word "force." You can only mean moral pressure, respectfully consistent with discipline. Moreover, we have recognised that general officers alone have a right to make an application to the Marshal. Let us recruit them as soon as possible.'

Lieutenant Thomas, faithful to the hierarchy, his eyes redder than ever, nodded his head. A Captain in the Engineers, with

an eager, sad face, then spoke. His sentiments were elevated, but the declamatory way in which he delivered them marred the hard things he was saying :

‘For a long time discerning eyes had seen Bazaine’s game. In addition to being incapable, he was a traitor. The pressure which he exercised over the newspapers, the systematic demoralization which he was propagating in the army, left no illusions as to his object—to restore the Empire, so as to derive profit from it. It was therefore necessary to act, but to act at once. After the 13th a sortie would be impossible; the army was too enfeebled. What was the good of recruiting new Generals, in losing time? Numbers would do nothing. One voice was sufficient, provided it spoke plainly. If Bazaine lent a deaf ear, well, they would offer the supreme command to others!’

‘Will you come to the great meeting?’ he asked. ‘Time is pressing. It isn’t in three days, it is to-morrow that Generals who have heart ought to speak to the Marshal!’

‘Well said, Rossel!’ cried D’Avol.

Another Captain, whose name was Boyenval, named two Generals, and offered to make an immediate application to them. He set off, accompanying Rossel, the carabineer, De Serres, and a few others, young men who talked loud and made their swords rattle. Gex and Cussac left shortly afterwards.

Complaints were still made. Carrouge, who was very animated, was listening, without hearing the complaints of an old citizen of Metz, M. Krudger, whose son was one of the most active members of the Municipal Council.

‘Compare these two sheets of to-day’s *Indépendant de la Moselle*!’ he was saying, with exasperation. ‘Here are the proofs, slashed by the Censor, and here is a copy of the newspaper, mutilated, with spaces. If this continues, the Metz newspapers will shortly appear in white. Coffinières and Bazaine only tolerate matter communicated by themselves, false news and rectifications to the enemy’s advantage. Compare! Look!’

‘Upon my faith!’ cried Bersheim, ‘the suppressions are instructive. Listen to this: “News which has been brought is good—very good. Let pessimists, then, have confidence, and let us no longer hear pronounced that word ‘capitulation,’ which makes one blush.” Struck out! Why?’

‘Worse still!’ continued M. Krudger. ‘An article by

Colonel Humbert, secretary at the École d'Application library, showed that the situation is not desperate, that France is arming. Coffinières has just destroyed it on the proofs. And, what you would never believe, Colonel Humbert only took his pen in hand after the visit of an officer of the staff, who came on behalf of Bazaine to ask for Thiers' work in which the capitulations of Baylen, Genoa, and Dantzic are mentioned !

There were a dozen officers there, some resting on crutches, others with their arms in slings, still pale, owing to their sojourn in the ambulance. They all looked at one another in disgust. D'Avol looked at Du Breuil and chuckled.

'A pretty commission ! Perhaps you know the officer ? One of your comrades ?'

More dryly than he intended, Du Breuil replied :

'I don't know him. At any rate, he is not responsible. He obeyed orders.'

'Yes, yes, we know—passive obedience ! It takes you a long way ! . . . As for me, I declare that when the yoke is shameful one throws it off. Don't you recognise that at the present time a sortie, with or without hope, can alone save the honour of the flag ? Yes or no ?'

Du Breuil knit his brow. He foresaw the shock. His loving heart, as much as his *amour-propre*, which was wounded to the quick, was suffering because of it. Why was D'Avol passionate to this extent ?

'I recognise it,' he conceded at last.

'Then, you approve of the steps which certain Generals are going to take in regard to Bazaine ?'

'I approve of everything which is compatible with discipline, nothing else.'

'Then,' said D'Avol, 'you blame us for substituting a better leader should Bazaine refuse to make a sortie ? You would blame us for preferring revolt to opprobrium—in a word, you would, if necessary, capitulate ?'

Du Breuil turned. Anine, accompanied by her mother, was behind them. Their presence made his blood boil. He drew himself up under the insult.

'I have replied to you. If Bazaine, or a leader properly invested with power, leads us to the opening, I shall be at my post !'

'In the meantime you cross your arms. You say to yourself, "I am screened. I obey. They order me to march, and I march ; they order me to give up my arms, and I give them

up." Discipline always! And don't you think that above this slothful, blind, soulless discipline there is a higher law, the feeling of honour?"

'Stop!' said Du Breuil with firmness. 'Do not let us, if you please, use such a word in a courteous discussion. I believe I understand honour as well as you.'

D'Avol cast a black look at him, but became silent. His arm in the sling trembled. The silence was accompanied by a feeling of great uneasiness. Mme. Bersheim and her husband appeared very troubled. Anine remained impassible, as though she heard nothing.

'It is certain,' said M. Krudger, conciliating, 'that we can hold out still longer than is thought. Our resources are going to be augmented by requisitions ordered in the town; henceforth neither corn nor flour will leave Metz. The approaching distribution of *cartes de consommation* will regulate waste. It seems to me,' he added, looking at his watch, 'that the meeting of officers of the National Guard at the Hôtel de Ville is lasting a long time.'

At this moment Gustave Le Martrois came running up, so out of breath that the glasses of his spectacles were covered with moisture. He announced with an inspired air that a riot was being prepared, and he appeared quite proud of it, because he professed advanced Republican opinions, to the alarm of his mother, the prudent Mme. Le Martrois. . . . The delegates of the officers of the National Guard, headed by the Mayor, had just, he explained, gone to the Governor's to obtain, if possible—his air was ironical—sure information. . . . These rumours of negotiations, this pretended great victory—all this maddened the town. During this time, one of the officers living at the common house had shattered the Emperor's bust, and then, in the midst of applause and whistling, had wrenched off the eagle of the flag, and had thrown it on the square. They were hustled a little, and in the row one of their acquaintances, M. Dumaine, had just received some good knocks.

'Well done!' said Bersheim. 'The fat egoist! the monopolizer! Will you believe it, that at the last domiciliary visit they discovered in his cellar more than thirty-six sacks of flour, corn, barrels of herrings, hams, baskets of eggs, preserves. . . . Enough to feed a regiment. He was gorging himself in secret without giving anything to the poor or to the wounded. We let him know that, so much had his conduct revolted us, he was never to put his foot in the house again!'

Carrouge, who was furious, asked Gustave for details. The eagle wrenched off and thrown on the square roused his indignation.

‘Brawlers!’ he said, hooking on his sword. ‘I’m going there.’

They could not retain him; but D’Avol and old M. Krudger, out of precaution, went with him. All the officers present preserved a constrained air. That eagle, shining on the staff of the flag, had crossed Italy, Spain, Germany, all the battle-fields of Europe, with its golden wings open. Du Breuil, although he thought himself resigned to the catastrophe in which the dynasty had foundered for the second time, felt the affront and murmured:

‘Anarchy is commencing! And they wish true soldiers to strike a blow at discipline? Come, it is criminal! How is it that D’Avol does not see into what a terrible mess, into what a state of chaos, a military conspiracy may lead us?’

It seemed to him that Anine, anxious, was staring at him, trying to penetrate, to understand him. Under her apparent calm he thought her wavering and irresolute. D’Avol’s heroism—a facile heroism, all nerves and bile, pride and bravado—perhaps captivated her! But perhaps also, possessed of uprightness and good sense, she understood what a painful sacrifice those who wished to preserve to the end inflexible respect for rule were making? Doubtless she was asking herself, like himself, where duty lay.

In these troubled hours, how to recognise duty? Above all, how to do it? How cruel to seek for it in the midst of bitterness, recrimination, and reproaches! How painful was this debated duty which brought old friends face to face, which rent the most sincere consciences! D’Avol? . . . Restaud? . . . Discipline? Honour?

CHAPTER V.

ON the 12th Du Breuil read on the new sheet of his calendar: ‘*Bataille d’Elchingen*, 1806.’ What a reproach these glorious memories, these radiant names! Yesterday, Masséna; to-day, Ney, the hero of Moscow—Ney, who at Waterloo said: ‘I would that all these bullets might enter my stomach!’—Ney, who would rather have been blown up on a powder-magazine than surrender!’

The situation became worse from hour to hour. In a *communiqué* the Marshal had contradicted the alleged great victory. On the previous day all distribution of food to the horses had ceased; in two days bread would be lacking. Frederick Charles had at first refused to allow Boyer to leave, then, upon receiving a favourable note from Versailles, had consented. His officer sent to parley had just arrived. Boyer was authorized to proceed before the King; an express train was in waiting at Ars; the Prince's Aide-de-camp would accompany him.

The General left about noon.

'A fine opportunity,' said Francastel, 'of showing the Prussians his new stars!'

'Pooh! shooting stars!' said Floppe mischievously.

However, the council, convoked by the Marshal in consequence of Frederick Charles's primary refusal, continued its sitting. In the presence of this favourable solution, which was in accordance with the wishes of almost all the members, they only had to deal with the recent manifestations in the town. Frossard and Lebœuf violently demanded that the eagle be replaced on the flagstaff of the Hôtel de Ville. People attached too much importance to that occurrence, replied Coffinières. A written order was necessary. But Bazaine kept silent. Coffinières then again asked that the lot of the town should be separated from that of the army. On October 20th, he could no longer give up the resources of the fort.

'Oh! oh! your master is getting excited,' Floppe was saying to Captain Chagres. 'One more that Bazaine has nicely fooled. You see it clearly now, eh? You're talking loud. You want to save Metz. Too late, *mon gros*! If we surrender, you will surrender also.'

Chagres shrugged his shoulders. He was a very brave man, but discussion wearied him. The other day he had kicked a brawler down the stairs of his office.

Boyer was followed in thought by many in the evening. Would he succeed in this strange mission, of which the wisest only thought with uneasiness? It was said that he was going to propose to the King of Prussia the following clauses: the town left alone to defend itself; evacuation of the wounded; departure of the army with arms and baggage for the South of France or Algeria, under the condition of remaining there until the end of the war. . . . But why should the conqueror accept such offers? Through humanity?—a sortie, even un-

fruitful, probably costing the Prussians twenty to thirty thousand men. That was very sentimental for an enemy which only had results in view, which was sacrificing everything for an object. . . . In order to gain a political advantage, since the Army of the Rhine alone was capable of re-establishing social order? A doubtful and precarious hope. In case the King and his counsellors welcomed him, which was improbable, would the army follow its leaders?

Nevertheless, so intense was the desire for hope that finely tempered souls—those of solid courage, men whose honour one could not suspect—came to cling to this last means of salvation. The state of fever in which each one was living gave birth to nightmares. All normal life was abolished. It was necessary to make allowance for these unique circumstances: this blockaded army, kept in ignorance of the tragic events which succeeded each other around her, passing from starts of delirious hope to the most dejected prostration. Worse than the total absence of news were the foolish rumours, the great invisible breaths which made people hesitate. No hope from outside; a divided Government which was itself fleeing before the enemy, or blockaded in Paris, which certainly could not hold out. Assuredly, had they known of the heroic defence of the capital, the desperate efforts of the Provisional Government, all these African, Italian, and Crimean Generals, these glorious chiefs of the supreme council, would not have been struck by such an insensibility of military honour, by such paralysis of will. Many came to ask themselves if a fresh butchery was necessary. Without horses to drag the cannon, without cavalry, forced with nothing but foot soldiers to pass beyond a terrible circle of shells and balls, was it not going to a monstrous massacre?

Captivity only presented to men of heart the image of a worse catastrophe, the shame of a humiliation to which death was preferable. Why, then, refuse an *honourable convention* which would allow them to leave with arms and baggage? To gain time seemed the most urgent necessity. . . . Could not they also believe—they had such a desire for belief—that the Commanders-in-Chief yielded to a humane duty in striving to safeguard this lamentable crowd of soldiers, emaciated, bowed, consumptive by hundreds, not only from the sufferings of captivity, but from the horrors of massacre? Was it improbable to suppose that these Marshals and these Generals had felt some pity before the innumerable faces of their

soldiers, those yellow, pale faces upon which one could read so strange an anxiety? . . . Alas! in that case what a lack of perspicacity, what a sad blindness! To have allowed themselves to be run to earth in this way!

Because the misfortune was, thought Du Breuil, Restaud, Laune, and many others, that these humane considerations, which were justifiable, if they wished to forget what personal ulterior motives were mixed up in them, rested on the iridescence of a soap-bubble. If Bismarck burst it by a breath, everything vanished. The enemy, faithful to its tactics, would have gained time, and the Army of the Rhine, sliding down the slope simply by the weight of its dead horses and its men without strength, would awaken at the bottom of the tomb.

Boyer was expected in the evening of the 13th. What probability was there, however, that he could return so soon? Detained by his duty, Du Breuil's only diversion the whole day was the interminable conversations of his neighbours. He was sickened by them. He knew beforehand what each one was going to say; the follies, the *tics* of all were familiar to him. Massoli, who expectorated, annoyed him as much as Francastel, squinting with satisfaction at his curled moustache. They were sad hours, hearing and seeing the falling rain. It unwound from the horizon its skein of gray thread; one heard the sobbing of the overflowing spouts. And Du Breuil thought of the sticky bivouacs, of the little tents soaked through, of the soldiers lying upon straw which had become dung, of those who, to find wood, plundered the last carpentry, of those who, observing a tacit armistice, crouched in the trenches of the outposts, looking from under the pointed hoods of their cloaks at the enemy's helmets, also motionless in the misty, watery distance.

He said to himself: 'What am I doing here? Like the others, I await Boyer's return, after having waited for that of Bourbaki.' He reflected upon the journey of Bazaine's private counsellor. What emotions might be felt by a French General passing across his country in the midst of fire and blood, under the guidance of a courteous but inflexible guardian, who would prevent him from exchanging the slightest word with his countrymen! Doubtless he was preparing the arguments and persuasive words which would entice old William and his suspicious bull-dogs, Moltke and Bismarck.

Would he even return? What had happened to Bourbaki, the dupe of a similar mission?—Bourbaki, whose inexplicable

departure and absence had maddened Metz to such an extent that a recent deputation ascertained that the General was not imprisoned at the École d'Application by order of Bazaine.

The rain fell—fell without stopping. Du Breuil watched it with a feeling of distress. It would contribute to their loss as much as famine. It weakened the soul, extinguished the fire of revolt. History is a witness to the fact that revolutions have been drowned by a storm. What was one to say of these torrents, the running of which, night and day, was doing away with all energetic action? Du Breuil thought that the conspiracy was in the water. To go from camp to camp, to recruit adherents, the mud must not stick to the soles of their boots; they must not be blinded by the wind and the rain. The Marshal, in his warm house, could play at billiards at his ease, while the leaders of the great meeting—the Rossels, the Boyenvals, D'Avol, Carrouge, and Charlys—soaked, covered with mud, worn out with rage and fatigue, struggled hard.

That first measure, upon the occasion of which they had clearly specified that all the forms of discipline would be respected, that visit to Bazaine of a few Generals in a body, had ended in nothing. In vain had Boisjol, eloquent in his roughness, said a few words, stifled by emotion; in vain had Chenot hinted with good-nature of the advantages of a sortie. Bazaine, surprised at the implicit censure of this demonstration, had dissembled, had put on his air of plain dealing: 'He had decided not to capitulate, *he gave them formal assurance of that*. General Boyer was going to draw up at Versailles a military convention which would allow the army to leave the fort honourably. If he was not successful, the Marshal agreed with them that a sortie must be made at all costs.' And, taking the map, he improvised a plan of march, on both banks of the Moselle, this time in a southerly direction. He adjourned immediate measures, declaring himself ready, adding that the situation of the army was not very agreeable, but that if another person, whoever he might be, wished to take charge of it, he would willingly abandon it to him.

'Yes, count upon that!' Carrouge had murmured.

He confided to Du Breuil that they were going to look for a chief who would consent to lead the army and the corps of officers. Supported by the adhesion of the Generals, who were decided to break a way out, he would go to the Marshal, beg him to place himself at their head, or if not to authorize them to act. Either the Marshal would take the direction of

the movement, or his very refusal would condemn him. They would be released from him by the words which he would deliver; the essential rules of discipline remained uninjured. . . . But Du Breuil was watching the rain, which inspired doubt and discouragement in him.

'Ah, if Bourbaki was here!' Carrouge was repeating. '*He* would have got us out of the difficulty! It is true we have Deligny. He has thoroughly studied the sortie; he has his plan. . . . But will he take the command? It is a grave responsibility.'

Ah no! thought Du Breuil, Deligny was not willing. All those they put forward would excuse themselves—Cissey like Deligny, Ladmirault like Cissey, Canrobert like Ladmirault. . . . Canrobert? . . . his rank, his seniority, his character, would have certainly marked him out for everybody's suffrages; but the attitude of effacement which he had taken up from the first, and the votes which he had made, bound him down. Besides, his loyalty would not permit of intrigues and ulterior designs; he replied for Bazaine as for himself: he affirmed that they would not capitulate. . . . No, no! no chief would take the supreme command. Everybody was ready to obey, nobody to command.

Rain, always rain. . . . It entered at the windows, flowed under the door, marked the floor at each entry of dripping officers. It finished by lulling Massoli to sleep with its sweet, monotonous sound. He was sleeping when they came to wake him. The Marshal asked for some confidential particulars about the southern route. Charlys was charged to send emissaries to assure themselves again of the state of the defences on the Château-Salins, Nomény, and Coin-sur-Seille roads. Francastel, who was returning from the Marshal's, announced that they were going to call upon all the horses of the inhabitants to yoke to the artillery. Du Breuil, sceptical—he knew these false departures so well—heard Carrouge's peevish voice like an obsession:

'Yes, yes, count upon that!'

At reveille on the following day Frisch spoke to him of distant reports heard in the night. Jubault, he said, pretended it was thunder, because there had been a violent storm, interspersed with hail. But no, it must have really been cannon. And Frisch hazarded:

'It perhaps was an army coming to their assistance?'

Du Breuil smiled sadly, and without replying tore the sheet

for the previous day's date from the calendar. It brought to light the date October 14th, 1806: *Jéna*. Napoleon's withering campaign—in seventeen days the Prussian monarchy destroyed, crushed! . . . What new victory on the days following was going to strike him in the face? What glorious feat at arms would make him further taste the ignominy of his situation? Bersheim had lent him books to kill the insomnia of his nights and the emptiness of his days. The 'Mémoires' of Napoleon filled his soul with bitter home-sickness. What an epoch! How he would have liked to have lived in it! Never had a Marshal of France dreamed of making a compromise in this manner. Dupont at Baylen had only surrendered twenty-five thousand men, and his very name was an opprobrium!

The distant cannonade still sounded. Some supposed it was the bombardment of Thionville, others guessed of Longwy. Décherac, resuming duty at headquarters—he was fêted—brought news from Metz. Coffinières, accused of duplicity and treason by an excited population, had had enough of it. In a fit of temper he had just sent in his resignation to the Marshal.

'General Laveaucoupet will doubtless replace him?' risked Massoli.

'No; the succession is too heavy for him to accept,' said Décherac. 'The Marshal will smooth Coffinières down, and he will let himself be persuaded. This poor Governor is between the hammer and the anvil. Metz reproaches him for being too Imperialist, Bazaine and his lieutenants for being too Republican. He no longer knows to which to listen.'

He related the troubles. Two days before, Coffinières had notified to the committees on domiciliary visits, which had met at the Hôtel de Ville, that the result of their operations would be placed, not in the town granaries, but in the military magazines. There was a great to-do, especially as the Governor had announced the near departure of the army and the inevitable bombardment which would follow, adding:

'Consequently, one must expect terrible things!'

'What is more,' continued Décherac, 'Coffinières yesterday informed the Municipal Council of the shocking state of the resources of the town and of the army. Thereupon indignation and stupor of these gentlemen, who express their painful astonishment in an address. Coffinières replied to-day by an acknowledgment of the Government of the National Defence. The manifestations still last.' He added: 'The women of Metz, who

have been so admirable towards our wounded, show themselves the most excited. The National Guards are in a state of effervescence. At this very moment they are asking Coffinières to guard the forts. Their representatives are going to ask Changarnier to place himself at their head. "We are betrayed, sold!" they cry. A wreath of immortelles has been laid on the head of Fabert's statue, and a flag has been placed in his hand.'

'It's a bear-garden,' said Massoli. 'If I were Governor of Metz——'

Décherac looked at him with wide-open mouth. On the day he was wounded, August 31st, he had left Massoli with jet-black hair. The Massoli who was speaking to him now had hair completely white. His astonishment caused laughter.

Bersheim and M. Krudger, whose large beard was pearly with rain, and other Metz citizens, arrived. They wished to see the Marshal. They heard detonations in the distance. Did they not recognise the noise of the fusillades and that of the mitrailleuses?

Certainly, affirmed M. Krudger, the Prussians had been beaten under Paris, and put to flight.

A Lieutenant in the National Guard was repeating as in a transport of fever:

'Our brothers—our brothers of the Loire! The army of succour! It is fighting at Gravelotte! Gentlemen, to arms! to arms!'

Two of the leading citizens were at last introduced into the presence of the Marshal. Bersheim confirmed to Du Breuil the extraordinary agitation of Metz. On the evening of the previous day, about nine o'clock, a rough crowd was stationed on the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville. Coffinières had appeared before the council, swearing on his honour and on his sword that he would never capitulate.

'At ten o'clock the council rose; the last strokes of the curfew-bell sounded; the groups kept silence; the gates of the Hôtel de Ville were opened. Our venerable Mayor, bare-headed, surrounded by his colleagues, stood on the first steps of the staircase of honour. Men holding lanterns lit up the group. In an agitated voice he read aloud the address which he was charged to transmit to Coffinières. I assure you it was poignant.' He added: 'There is the council of defence and the committee of supervision over supplies constituted at last! Five commissions make domiciliary visits. It is quite time!'

The Lieutenant of the National Guard said in a state of frenzy to Du Breuil :

‘ Bazaine betrays, Major ! He dines with Frederick Charles every day. One of my friends was walking on the evening of the day before yesterday near the Frescati farm. Near the railway he heard horses’ hoofs. He hid himself in a ditch. Three horsemen came up. On a level with the crossing one of them said, “ It is here, Marshal, that we must dismount.” An orderly led the horses, while the others went in the direction of the Jouy road. My friend heard the rumbling of a carriage which stopped and, turning round, carried away the Marshal and his accomplices.’

Bersheim shook his head. Forsooth, everything was possible. The fever which made one see ambushes, perfidy, and treason everywhere seized him also. Had they not forbidden the *gérants* of the newspapers, under pain of their sheets being suppressed, to announce Boyer’s departure ?

The two leading citizens left the Marshal’s little satisfied. Bazaine did not think that the cannonade indicated a battle. Doubtless the Prussians bombarded Verdun. He had replied to one of his interlocutors, who had reported to him supplies of corn :

‘ Yes, I know where there’s wheat—in Beauce ; and oxen—in Normandy !’

They left in the breaks which had brought them. M. Krudger’s white beard floated in the wind. . . .

‘ News of Boyer, gentlemen !’ said Colonel Jacquemère. ‘ An officer sent on parley has just brought a despatch dated from Versailles, announcing his arrival after a journey of forty-eight hours. He is going to see M. Bismarck immediately.’

Surprise and disappointment were great. Boyer not being able to arrive before two or three days, the imminence of measures to be taken struck the most indolent. Massoli leant over the map upon which they were tracing the works built by the enemy. Francastel was recopying a note on the positions of the German troops. They spoke again of the sortie. They were going to pay the October and November pay in advance.

‘ Eh ! oh !’ said Floppe jeeringly. ‘ The Marshal looks after the cash ! That is easy to understand. The quarters’ pay of 180,000 francs a year are good to receive.’

These remarks ill beguiled the expectation and anguish. They felt too well that the fate of the army depended on Boyer’s success, and already two words whispered by Bazaine’s staff—

'Too late!'—sounded the knell of last hopes and vain efforts. The agony of the Army of the Rhine had commenced. Marauding soldiers entered Metz in spite of the closing of the gates and the interdictions, and forcibly took bread from the bakers. Many prowled before the houses, and Bersheim had seen one of them fall down through weakness in his courtyard.

On the 15th and the 16th Du Breuil was consumed by expectation and inaction. It was a gloomy Sunday in his bedroom. Happily, Judin was coming to see him. Metz was calming down a little. The Marshal, having found nobody willing to replace Coffinières, had obliged him, in amiable terms, to take back his resignation. 'Both of us,' he wrote to him, 'have done everything it was possible to do in the spirit of the regulations. . . .'

The spirit of the regulations? Come, now! The dead letter. To dare to speak of vain formulæ when the life of an army, the salvation of a fortress, were at stake! . . . Du Breuil, besides, was tired of hearing the town spoken about, the grievances of the town, which in time irritated him. Was it not the army, after all, which had placed the forts in a state of defence, which by its presence had avoided a bombardment? He was more interested in the unfortunate soldiers, shivering with cold and dying with hunger in their bivouacs. Judin related to him the application of the delegates of the National Guard to Changarnier. The brave old fellow had disinclined them by the eulogy of Bazaine and an apology for discipline. Evidently, nobody would put himself forward. Cissey and Ladmirault, all those whom they had sounded, had withdrawn. The Marshal had received the officers of the National Guard, and repeated that, if they found his method of commanding bad, they had only to appoint another chief. To put a stop to the attempts of the ringleaders, knowing that they had drawn up a surprise plan for the occupation of the forts and the military posts in the town, he had summoned Captains Rossel and Boyenval before him, admonished the first and put the second in prison at Saint-Quentin.

Judin, who was walking up and down the bedroom, stopped before the ephemerides of the calendar.

'October 16th, 1805: *Prise d'Ulm*, by the French. . . . The devil!' he said. 'History has a cruel wit.'

On the following day Du Breuil, whose anxiety was increasing hour after hour, was astonished to learn that the Marshal, sounded by Jarras on the necessity of opening out a passage,

had replied that, the 18th and the 19th being the anniversaries of the battle of Leipsic, they could not fight on those days. June 18th, 1855, chosen by our allies the English as the anniversary of Waterloo, our attack by main force at Malakoff had failed. . . . Singular reply! . . . Superstition? An excuse for attempting nothing.

At last, about three o'clock, Boyer arrived, and was closeted immediately with the Marshal. His journey had again lasted forty-eight hours. When going, the train had been unable to pass a station beyond Château-Thierry, owing to the tunnels and the bridges being cut. The Prussian guard had conducted him to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, whence he had gone round Paris to reach Versailles. The same route was followed on the return journey.

The news of his arrival spread like a train of powder. The anxious army wished to know its destiny. Generals and officers of all ranks thronged to headquarters; but Boyer showed himself very reserved on the reply given by the King, pretending to be fairly well satisfied, and to be counting on a favourable solution. As to information obtained on the subject of the state of France, he stated it was lamentable. France was being dismembered by a horrible state of anarchy. The Government of the National Defence, already divided between Paris and Tours, was rending itself, even in Paris, to such a point that Gambetta and Kératry had had to make off in a balloon to escape the animosity of their colleagues and that of the population. The phantom of power established at Tours was fleeing to Toulouse—it was said even to Pau. The North asked for peace, Rouen and Havre asked for Prussian garrisons; Lyons had proclaimed a Revolutionary Government, Marseilles another; the Midi was trying to separate itself, the West held itself aside in the name of Catholic principles. A semblance of an army—forty thousand militia on the Loire—had just been defeated at Artenay, a few leagues from Orleans. A National Assembly was to result from the elections of October 16th and 17th; but this decree having been cancelled, the elections remained postponed until the country was free. The dictatorship remained in the hands of Gambetta. To so many calamities had just been added the ingratitude of a country which owed France so much—Italy claimed possession of Nice and Savoy.

On the 18th the council met to hear this heartrending recital, to know the result of the negotiations, and to come to a fresh

decision. Bismarck did not wish to negotiate the fate of the army, except on the condition that it remained faithful to the Government of the Regency, which was alone capable of making peace and of re-establishing it. It was necessary, therefore, to address themselves to the Empress. General Boyer would set off immediately to beg her to again take over the power, and to enter into *pourparlers* with headquarters at Versailles. The army would assure her its support through gratitude; would go with her to an open town, where they would convoke the former State bodies. The Imperial Government would be restored, and peace signed there.

Du Breuil and Décherac passed a mournful evening in Restaud's room, each one completing what the other said, drawing a black and terrible picture of known miseries, alternately facing the funereal narrow way into which Bazaine had led the army, and which was blocked up by an unscalable cemetery wall.

'In short,' declared Du Breuil, 'Paris and her forts still hold out. As to the bad news spread about by Boyer, it all comes from a German source. He has not communicated to the council the newspapers which he brought back! . . . Was it because they mention the moderate acts of the Government of the National Defence, and are not in accordance with his pessimistic narratives? You doubt?' he said, in answer to a gesture expressive of protest from Restaud. 'Well, it is true he has brought back two newspapers. The Marshal's doctor has read them. . . . I augur ill of a mission the account of which commences with a lie. Besides, has it been so difficult for him to question fellow-countrymen? He exchanged a few words upon the return journey with the Mayor of Bar-le-Duc. At Versailles his presence caused a manifestation at the Hôtel des Réservoirs, the rumour of the arrival of a French General having spread. They must have done everything to get information to him. A barber and an old female servant were placed at his disposal in the house which he occupied. . . . So bound to secrecy as he was, could he not obtain other details? But, after all, let us believe Boyer on parole. Are the conditions which he makes known any the less a lure? What does Bismarck want? To draw us on until we are completely exhausted. Bazaine must be blinded by ambition or fascinated by danger to judge otherwise.'

'Why?' objected Décherac. 'Perhaps Bismarck's proposition is our salvation. Reflect! In the present state of dis-

order the imperial restoration might offer enough advantages to Prussia to try to make it stable by her moderation.'

Restaud ventured to say, but without conviction, and as though he was trying to persuade himself:

'Since we have done so much to enter into this perilous path of negotiations, the Empress's acceptance would save everything. We are not released from our oath; we have received no communication from the Provisional Government. If the Empress loyally places her trust in us, the army will follow this beautiful and unfortunate woman, and for my part——'

'But think, Restaud,' said Du Breuil, 'that our last hope vanishes if the Empress refuses! Do you think that Boyer has a chance of succeeding where Bourbaki doubtless failed? Because I augur no good from his silence. One must be very ill to believe in such fever-phantoms. In a few days' time famine will revenge itself on this demoralized crowd, whose patience and resignation are exhausted. Bismarck is playing with us like a cat plays with a mouse. And the stupid Bazaine, the blind council does not see it! . . . A week ago they decided that overtures should be commenced within forty-eight hours, and that if the enemy's conditions were not compatible with military honour, they would try to make a way through by force. . . . There are formal resolutions! To-day they recant. What is more, they cling to a broken branch—the fallen régime. They do not even consider the horror of a civil war, and in this criminal proceeding not one asks himself whether the army will follow them.'

'Since the commanders of the army corps have this very day,' said Restaud, 'assembled the Generals, the chiefs of the corps and the departments, to unfold to them the state of affairs, and to have their opinion, we shall know it to-morrow.'

'Yes,' laughed Du Breuil, 'and they anticipate the Generals' replies so well that, without waiting to know what those replies are, Bazaine, immediately after the meeting, asks Frederick Charles for Boyer's safe-conduct.'

The three officers exchanged reflections until two o'clock in the morning. Changarnier was present at the council on the invitation of Bazaine. His experience was precious; they could take shelter behind it.

'Have you noticed,' said Du Breuil, 'that the Marshal has done everything to strike, to lower the *moral* of the army? Since the opening of the war our losses were carefully stated, that

we may know we have lost forty thousand men, in addition to three hundred officers and twenty-four general officers! The enemy's forces were enumerated in regard to the inferiority of ours! All the newspapers publishing by order the nomenclature, certainly exaggerated, of German siege works! And what of the official communications made this very day to the troops—the enumeration in eighteen paragraphs of the said works, with the positions of the army corps!

'Add,' said Décherac, 'corruption by favours, medals and crosses given in profusion!'

'Ah!' murmured Du Breuil despairingly, 'if the Marshal would still make a sortie!'

Décherac sadly shook his head.

'It is already very late. In three or four days what will happen? Dissolution is commencing. Thousands of disbanded men every night go beyond the outposts to dig the ground, to drag up potatoes. A kind of armistice reigns. At certain points the German firing has ceased; they confer with the enemy, who hold before our men the hope of immediate peace. In short, the soldier is disgusted; he's had enough.'

'Let us try, and we shall see,' said Du Breuil.

When Décherac and Restaud had gone, the declarations of the members of the council tormented him with heartrending doubts. Ought they not to believe these men of tried bravery when they affirmed the impossibility of an attempt by main force? And in what terms?

Frossard: 'We cannot make a sortie.'

Ladmirault: 'We shall be brought back; we cannot count upon the troops, but I am ready to obey.'

Canrobert: 'It is escape, not a sortie. No hope of success; at the end we await dispersion and disaster.'

Soleille: 'No sortie; nothing dismays him so much as the thought of the inevitable disorders which would follow. They will not even pass through the first lines of the enemy.'

But why these diametrically opposite opinions?

Lebœuf: 'He does not believe in success, but asks that they attempt a foolish but glorious thing!'

Desvaux: 'Let us make a sortie after having left our troops under Metz until they could no longer live; they can still demand of them a sacrifice!'

Coffinières: 'He repeats what he said before at the first conference—"If they could not obtain honourable conditions, they must try to make a way by force of arms!"'

And while the seven others rallied to negotiations, Lebœuf and Coffinières voted in the negative.

They were right—Lebœuf partly redeeming his faults as former Minister of War, Coffinières trying to make amends for his lack of foresight and his weakness. Who could know the possibilities of a desperate resolution? But they had not listened to them. . . . Moreover, what a strange contradiction on the part of this council, which at the time of taking the most risky step unanimously decided that the Commander-in-Chief must not accept any delegation to ratify this very step, because it was necessary for the army to remain *outside all political negotiations*. Was this want of logic? asked Du Breuil. Who did they deceive? Did they want to delude themselves?

A second council of war was held on the following day, the 19th. Boyer left immediately afterwards. It was a stormy meeting. A warm intervention on the part of Changarnier had rallied the suffrages in favour of an application to the Empress. In the midst of the most bitter recriminations, they had violently accused Coffinières of over-exciting the town; they reproached him with having recognised the Government of the National Defence by his official acts. One commander of a corps had called him the President of the Republic of Metz, and demanded his immediate removal from office. Another cried that he would never pardon himself for having countersigned his appointment. Coffinières replied that his resignation had been given in; he renewed his offer to the Marshal, who refused. Again, he insisted on the complete separation of the town and of the army, and called to mind that on the next day, the 20th, he was no longer under an engagement to furnish supplies to the army.

The Commissary General of Stores became excited. The men, to whom they had distributed the last allowance of bread, would only have horseflesh to eat in two days' time. It was decided that each member of the council should use his influence with the officers and troops to make them accept the desired solution.

On the 20th and the 21st rain was still falling. Du Breuil, Restaud, even the careless Décherac, passed through all the forms of morbid expectation. On Friday Du Breuil, during a spell of fine weather, made a tour of the Ban Saint-Martin. He stopped before each bivouac. All the bivouacs had a mournful appearance. It was the hour for *soupe*; the fires, made with wet wood, burned with difficulty; a strong wind

was blowing the smoke in the soldiers' faces. The men, soaked in their cloaks, proceeded with weak, bent backs, porringer in hand, under the tents, swallowed their horseflesh broth without bread or salt, and quickly went to sleep. Sleep during the day, sleep at night, a continual torpor stupefied these men, who had suffered too much. Du Breuil had turned away his eyes, so as not to see the horses. One thousand of them were now dying daily. There were not sufficient tumbrils to carry them to the graves; they no longer even succeeded in killing and burying them. Carrion and skeletons, they infected the air and putrefied the mud.

Barrus, occupied in spreading in the camps his revolutionary ideas, came out of an officer's tent. His beard, which he no longer shaved, was growing thick and black; his eyes burned.

'Well, infamy is consummated!' he said. 'Our leaders, without shame, appeal to the Empire which has been our ruin! But history will relate some day these underhand machinations. The verbal communication which the chiefs of the corps have made to their officers is astounding, without a parallel. And the declaration to the Generals!' He quoted it from memory: "'If the Regent agrees to the propositions of peace, she will be represented by Marshal Bazaine. The army will not receive rations to-morrow; the day after to-morrow wine and meat will be distributed. The French army will leave Metz in three days' time, with the consent of the Prussians, to re-establish order in France. The chiefs of the corps are asked to make numerous propositions for the cross and the medal. Officers will receive pay for November.'" But what is unknown,' he added, 'are the terms of the treaty which Boyer is carrying. Bazaine stipulates in it such extensive powers that he is made dictator. And there is nobody to act. The inhabitants of Metz cavil and dispute like the Greeks of Byzantium. There are times when I feel inclined to enter Bazaine's house and blow out his brains. They will shoot me, but what does that matter to me?' He made a gesture of despair. His excitement increased. 'Look, the roads are turned into rivers, and the bivouacs are marshes! The tents have become the colour of earth. To see their long files, wouldn't you think they were the tumuli of a cemetery? These men in tatters are spectres rather than soldiers! That is what Bazaine has made of the finest army in France!' Suddenly he drew a paper from his pocket, and said: 'Look; read *that*!' He moved rapidly away.

It was a manuscript proclamation from the Metz National Guards to their brothers of the army, an appeal to arms.

'What is the good?' thought Du Breuil, with rage. 'The army, because it is powerless, will resign itself. And what can the town do? . . .' But to admit that was to him the worst humiliation. Thus to be bound, strangled, stifled; to will and to be unable to act; to be nothing, to dare to do nothing; to have handcuffs on one's wrists and on one's neck the yoke of duty and passive obedience! . . .

On Sunday, the 23rd, he went to Metz in wretched weather. On the way he was surprised to meet D'Avol, mounted on an admirable thoroughbred full of fire. Both his hands were free. With sure touch he was controlling the unruly animal with his left hand. Without intention, a kick from the horse bespattered Du Breuil, who, shaking his stained sleeve, knit his brow. D'Avol stopped. He was displeased. With an aggressive smile he said:

'He needs taking out. He only asks to be allowed to charge!'

'A new horse?' said Du Breuil.

'Yes, from the Emperor's stables. Prince d'Eylau sold him to me. I give it the best corn.'

'You feed well. Last week, however, the Marshal forbade horses to be so fed,' said Du Breuil, trying to smile, but his bitterness gaining the upper hand.

D'Avol said:

'In future I only consult myself. The soldier who, wishing to make a sortie, would allow his horse to die, and his arms to rust, would be a fool. He who wishes to see the end wishes for the means of accomplishing it. . . . Eh, old fellow?'

He stroked the thoroughbred's neck.

The animal trembled, ready to bound forward, its eye shining, its coat covered with perspiration. D'Avol looked down upon his friend.

'Well, and your Jew? They have shot him!'

'What Jew?'

'The spy Gugl! You don't wear your ring any longer?'

Du Breuil uttered a dry 'No.'

'You are going to the Bersheims?' continued D'Avol. 'You'll find Anine there. There is no doubt she will be charmed to see you.'

Du Breuil, astounded, looked at him. D'Avol's face had an evil look upon it.

'Much pleasure may you have,' he said, and without otherwise saying good-bye he quieted his horse, which was prancing. Then, changing his mind, he said: 'A piece of advice! You censured me the other evening before Anine, and in my absence.'

'I?'

'Yes, you. You said that it was criminal to wish, by means of a conspiracy, to get out of the shameful difficulty in which we are involved.'

'I think so.'

'That is possible. Don't say it any more.'

'Why?'

'Because I abstain from saying before Anine what I think of your inaction.'

'However, you injured me in her presence.'

'And you attack me from behind!'

There was a painful, a terrible silence, during which they penetrated to the bottom of each other's souls. D'Avol continued:

'Also, while I'm here, my dear fellow, remember this: Sometimes I've given you lessons, but I have never received any.'

'There is still time.'

'What do you say?'

'Don't you hear? Is it your horse which prevents you?'

D'Avol turned pale.

'You provoke me!'

Du Breuil replied:

'I'm tired of your raillery and disdain. I don't merit them.'

'I don't like hypocrites,' said D'Avol, with great rage. 'Who introduced you to the Bersheims? Why do you do me an injury with Anine? Do you think I haven't understood your looks, silences, and the accord of your smiles?'

'Don't let us speak of this young lady, Jacques. Neither of us has the right.'

D'Avol's face became painfully rigid.

'Yes, since you love her! Well, let her judge between us. I, at least, risk my life for honour.'

'And I risk honour,' said Du Breuil scoffingly, 'to save my life. Is that what you wish to say?'

'You've saved me the trouble.'

Du Breuil said haughtily:

'Your horse is getting impatient. . . .'

D'Avol cried :

' We shall see each other again !'

In his look of mingled jealousy, hatred, and reproach, there appeared all the horror of an affection which is infected by malice. He made a gesture expressing threats and farewell. His horse, spurred on its flanks, made a bound of surprise, carrying him away in the midst of the splashing of puddles. Du Breuil felt a smart, mingled with regret and remorse. His injured pride, however, did not prevent him from growing tender. By losing D'Avol he felt how dear his friend had been to him. He cursed this hideous war which was poisoning the blood, irritating men's characters. The appeal to Anine's verdict left in him a feeling of deep anxiety. Thus Jacques confessed, proclaimed himself his rival, and both struggled, without knowing what the young lady—the stake they were quarrelling over—would think upon seeing herself thus disputed. Were they not doing her an offence simply by bandying her name? Du Breuil suffered to see his doubts and suspicions realized. . . . What! D'Avol had loved, desired her! Being a bold man, perhaps he had confessed his love? . . . He was filled with jealousy. . . . He experienced a feeling of hatred, and at the same time the injustice of his friend's accusations revolted him. He who was so discreet, so reserved, a hypocrite! He who only thought of Anine with respectful fervour!

A small Second Lieutenant, white and shivering under his cloak, saluted him in Bersheim's courtyard. Maurice had received the epaulet three days before. He also had come from the camps, the African fevers having again seized him. He was trembling like an old man. Bersheim came out from one of the ground-floor rooms, accompanied by Dr. Sohier. 'Père Coupe-Toujours' had aged by reason of overwork—too many amputations! His lip curled up in a grimace of disgust, and his eyes expressed a violent antipathy for everything he looked upon. He had seen too much; he had had enough of it!

'What would you have me do?' he was saying. 'This child has a raging typhoid fever. She will be lucky if she pulls through.' He was speaking of Thibaut's little girl. 'And the mother on the eve of her confinement! She has chosen her time well! . . . And this fellow,' he said, feeling Maurice's pulse. 'Go, my boy; you can take your quinine. If Boyer doesn't get us out of this, we shall all die here.'

He made a gesture of anger against the sombre sky, the rain, the town full of wounded, with its odour of fever and gangrene.

‘Father Desroques, a victim of his charity and devotion, is dying,’ said Bersheim to Du Breuil. ‘You know how much we love him.’

At that moment Maurice coughed—a dry, violent, continued fit. Everybody looked at him in silence. Sohier suddenly became furious, and repeated :

‘Take your quinine, my boy, and wear wool next to the skin!’

A painful uneasiness followed upon his departure. They entered Bersheim’s study. Maurice made off.

‘General Boisjol, who is out of all patience, has just left here,’ Bersheim announced. ‘He said to me that each day was a battle lost. Well, what is there fresh? Boyer?’

A telegram from Luxemburg had announced that the General had been delayed twenty-four hours. His return was not far off. Du Breuil knew nothing else, save stories about the check Bourbaki had received. . . . The Empress had let him see to what an extent they had taken advantage of his credulity. She did not know this Régnier, had refused to receive him; the passport with which he was invested, and that photograph signed by the Prince Imperial, came from the *entourage*. With noble patriotism, she was reluctant to go against the wishes of France. Du Breuil had a vision of the Sovereign, with her despotic charm, her haughty eyes, in all the magnificence of her fair beauty, crossing the saloons at Saint-Cloud. Such a face could not deceive; it would retain, proud to the end, the majesty of renunciation and silence. . . . Boyer, when at Versailles, had seen a letter from Bourbaki to the King of Prussia, in which the General, authorized by him to enter Metz, thanked William. How was it, therefore, that he had not yet returned? Doubtless he had gone to place himself under the orders of the Government of the Defence. On the other hand, the Marshal had just decided to send emissaries to the new power. Two interpreters—Valcount and Prieskiwitch—had taken a despatch in which Bazaine, complaining that he had received no news, urgently asked for some, as famine would very shortly oblige him to come to a decision in the interest of France and of the army.

‘What!’ exclaimed Bersheim indignantly. ‘He is running after two hares at the present time! Ah yes! I understand.

If the Empress refuses, he will try to make an arrangement with the present Government. He only thinks of himself—always of himself—but in truth a little late. What does it matter to him if his army rots and dies of starvation! . . . They have shot traitors for less than that!’ He continued: ‘Assuredly this is the end of Metz, the end of the army, the end of everything. Coffinières has informed the council that on the 28th the inhabitants will eat their last mouthful of bread. Then, if the army abandons us, it is a very simple matter—the Germans will enter the town after a few days; and when they have taken possession of Metz, they will never, never give it up. They will tear away a large part of France, and will make it Prussian territory. What will become of us, inhabitants of Metz, French citizens? As for me, I shall expatriate myself with my family. I shall say farewell to this town in which my family has lived, where my father and mother are at rest in the cemetery. I won’t speak of my fortune. I will leave the ruins behind me. The war will have taken all from me. My son André is dead, and he who remains is feeble and weak. My God! my God! the affliction is too great! . . .’

Bersheim, his elbows upon his desk, burst into tears. Du Breuil was touched to the heart.

‘My poor friend . . . courage. Nothing is lost. . . . Boyer may succeed. . . . We may yet make a way out. . . . One knows not what to-morrow will bring forth.’

But he did not believe it, and Bersheim did not believe it either. It was a horrible misfortune for the two men. The door opened, and Anine entered. She saw her father sobbing, rushed forward, and threw her arms around him.

‘Father . . . you, who are so brave! You, who set the example! . . . What! you also!’ she said, turning towards Du Breuil, whose eyes were filled with tears. ‘If I were a man I should not cry. One doesn’t cry when one has done one’s duty, and when one has nothing to reproach one’s self with.’

In the heavy nightmare which oppressed him, Du Breuil felt an inexpressible alleviation. She absolved him then; she understood, she pitied him. She was not satisfied with words and bravado. She gave him the credit of honour; she did not doubt that he had done, that he was ready to do, everything possible.

‘Your conscience is here, father!’

She turned once more towards Du Breuil. He could not mistake the affectionate brightness in her look.

'If you knew,' she said, with touching enthusiasm, 'all that he has expended in devotion, zeal, and charity in these three months! But our workmen, our wounded, all who know us, will remember. Come, father! If Metz must die, it will not be your fault. It will not be the fault of any soldier or officer of this brave army. The burden must be borne by those who are responsible; censure and dishonour is theirs. If Metz ceases to be French, we will leave, and will press still closer together, so as to feel the coldness of exile less. . . .'

'Ah!' murmured Bersheim, 'if the army were willing!'

It was his last cry of revolt. He did not explain what the army could do, by what means it ought to act. He thought that it had only to rush forward in a mass, a blind crowd. He forgot that the soldiers needed leaders, that this speechless giant needed a motive brain.

'Father,' said Anine sweetly, 'do you think our friends are not willing? . . . They need the means.'

'Our friends!' In saying these words, she enveloped Du Breuil with a look of pity and loyal goodness. . . . It warmed his heart.

'Assuredly, one has gone as far as one can,' he said, 'without ruining discipline. Lapasset and Bisson asked for troops, and offered to make a sortie. Desvaux, Deligny, and Boisjol only ask to rush upon the enemy with the Guard; but an order is necessary.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Bersheim. 'I understand why Bazaine does not dare to show himself in the town. He would be insulted, scoffed at; the very cobble-stones would rise to stone him.'

Du Breuil returned sadly to the Ban Saint-Martin. Marquis, whom he met on the Place Fabert, confided to him that the Comte de Paris was King of France, with Thiers and Trochu as Ministers. Peace was signed, and it cost them 4,000,000,000 francs. Marquis appeared disconsolate.

'Just at the moment resolute men were going to make a sortie!'

Du Breuil was tired with his boasting. Around them Metz presented a lamentable spectacle. Everywhere were wretched groups of people, the eddies of the swell of the populace. In the low quarters of the town sick people in rags, and bands of famished men and women, besieged the bakers' shops, which

had been closed by order, for they only sold bread at fixed hours, and on the presentation of personal cards. Upon returning to headquarters, Du Breuil again found the same state of idle and gloomy waiting. He experienced a miserable little pleasure when looking over the list of decorations to see the name of Judin. He saw on the list neither that of Restaud nor of Védél. With scandalous frenzy men's ambitions, egoisms, and meannesses made them crowd to the Marshal's office. He was signing all propositions for the medal and the cross, thus pacifying bitternesses and hostility, satisfying the vilest *amour propre* at the expense of solidarity in the common misfortune.

On the 24th the rain was torrential. Frisch, in pushing open the door, brought in with his sabots the mud and cold from outside.

'There is no more oats, sir, for Cydalise. But I've found a sack of beetroot seeds which is for sale. Captain Restaud's horse is very bad. . . .' He ventured to say: 'They say there are some regiments where the men weep for hunger.'

Three hours afterwards the arrival of an officer bearing a despatch from Frederick Charles shattered Bazaine's last hopes. Bismarck telegraphed the check which Boyer had received. The Empress had refused to sanction any kind of transaction, just the same as she refused to sign any treaty the basis of which was a surrender of territory. The Imperial Government, decidedly, would not find any support in France. The King did not wish to impose it. Besides, the Marshal had given none of the guarantees which were asked for as the primary basis of every convention—that is to say, the surrender of the town of Metz and the signatures of the leaders of the army recognising the Regency, and undertaking to re-establish it. Under these conditions there was no longer any need to continue political negotiations. The question was a military one, and its solution must be found in war.

It was a strange thing that, though Du Breuil foresaw and awaited this reply from the Chancellor, it came upon him as such a cruel deception that he was filled with unspeakable rage. The Marshal and his council fooled, duped! The Empress, with meritorious dignity, refused to interfere; the case for the Empire was lost from the first day. By placing before us this mirage of negotiations, Bismarck had brought us to final exhaustion! He raised the mask now! What step was the council, which had been convoked immediately, going to take?

What energetic and desperate resolutions? . . . He awaited the Marshal's decision, every now and then exchanging a word with Restaud and Décherac with exceedingly anxious feelings of hope and doubt. Certain faces at that time appeared to him odious—those of Massoli, Francastel, Floppe. . . . Laune, badly cured of his jaundice, had recovered his dry rigidity. Charlys, always out of doors, went from camp to camp, his thinness more and more emphasizing his Don-Quixote-like silhouette.

When this interminable meeting came to an end, Du Breuil and his companions learnt that recourse to arms was considered impossible. Credulous to the end, Bazaine and his council placed in the hands of General Changarnier the painful mission of parleying with the conqueror. With the authority of his illustrious name, the veteran consented to go and ask Prince Frederick Charles to consent to the following conditions: Neutralization of the army on the spot, and an armistice for revictualling; offer to appeal to the deputies and the powers in office at the time of the Constitution of May, 1870, to treat for peace. If this first article were not accepted, to ask for the relegation to a spot of the territory to fulfil there the same mission of order; or to obtain, in the clauses of a capitulation for lack of supplies, the sending of the army into Algeria.

'No!' exclaimed Du Breuil. 'At such a time still to delude one's self with political hopes passes all imagination!'

The opinions of the Commanders-in-Chief were severely discussed. Desvaux, Lebœuf, and Coffinières alone had asked for a desperate sortie. Desvaux had said the Guard would follow its Generals and officers. But all the others had disagreed with such a sortie. Ladmirault, who was ready, however, to obey, foresaw the greatest disaster. Frossard and Soleille confirmed his statements; the cavalry was dismounted, the artillery could not be yoked. All directions for a sortie had been recognised impracticable. There was no bread left, and meat was running out. The only thing to do was to treat.

Du Breuil passed a mournful night. In vain did he try to go to sleep; he was devoured by a thousand furious, gadfly-like thoughts. The darkness stifled him. In spite of the cold and the dampness of the walls, he panted, his forehead flushed. He relighted his candle. Where was he? Why was he there? Never had the horror of his situation appeared to him so striking.

This was what they had reached hour by hour, minute by minute, by reason of heedlessness, inactivity, lured on by *pour-parlers*. . . . Capitulation! . . . Notwithstanding the flashes which, in certain lucid moments, had disclosed to him the dark declivity, he had never sounded the depth of the abyss. All the protestations of his indignant conscience then came to light. His restrained feelings of revolt rebelled against the leader who, by his thoughtlessness, carelessness, and incapacity, had prepared the disaster which his egoism and ambition was now completing. He lived those three months over again, so many hours not one of which had been without its suffering. He was troubled by the unintentional or intentional faults of the Marshal.

These were, at the time of the retreat on Verdun, on August 14th, the placing on one side of his indispensable collaborator, General Jarras, the slowness of orders, late or inadequate, neglecting to destroy bridges, the employment of a single road when four were free, the disbanding of the auxiliary commissariat waggons which carried the supplies; then, as soon as the Emperor was got rid of, that incomprehensible stoppage on August 16th, after the glorious Rezonville fight. Afterwards, the return under Metz, which was justified neither by the state of provisions nor that of the ammunition; the shameful way in which he had left Canrobert to be crushed on the 18th, notwithstanding his urgent and repeated appeals for help. He had deceived the Emperor by pleading lack of provisions as a reason for not continuing his march, by letting him believe on the 19th that he was going to reach Montmédy (which had made MacMahon determine to come to his assistance); finally, by informing the Minister of War, on August 26th, that he could not force the enemy's lines, while he assured MacMahon that he could break through when he wanted!

Once within the intrenched camp, what measures had he taken to supply his army with food if he had decided not to make a sortie? Not one. He had not gathered in the resources of the suburbs of Metz. And those which existed he had squandered by not immediately placing the army and the town on short allowances, by allowing the soldiers to waste the provisions and bread, by giving the horses corn or rye which should have nourished the men. . . . But perhaps he had counted on making a sortie? The conference of Grimont was, then, only a farce. He had deceived his lieutenants:

not content with hiding from them the march of the Châlons army, of which he had been informed by a despatch, he took good care not to communicate to them his own despatches to the Emperor, to the Minister, and to the Marshal. Knowing that supplies had been reconstituted, he had let Soleille affirm that there was only sufficient ammunition for one battle. And why had he not made a sortie at Noisseville on August 31st and September 1st? Since Sedan, what had he done with the exception of engaging in negotiations with the enemy: asking Prince Frederick Charles for information, making Régnier a confidant, allowing Bourbaki to freely proceed to Hastings, sending Boyer to Bismarck, and then to the Empress?

He had disguised the truth to the end. On October 10th he had kept silent on the subject of his *pourparlers*, the Régnier incident, the motives for Bourbaki's departure, the dépôts of provisions at Thionville and at Longwy! He did not confess that he had himself already unsuccessfully entered into the negotiations which the council decided to make! On the 18th he intercepted the newspapers which were brought back by Boyer. He exaggerated bad news—spread it about in the camps. The Marshal had tried to unnerve his army by every means, to destroy all its energy, to transform it into a docile eunuch, into a passive instrument of his policy.

What had been the dream of this fortunate soldier, this parvenu of war, enriched in honours? By what underground operations of thought had he descended to this fierce egoism, to this monstrous blindness? How and why? By what madness of ambition? The hope of supplanting Trochu, of thrusting himself before the Emperor and France as the saviour, the arbitrator of the destinies of the country? A very miserable speculation! It was an unworthy calculation on the part of a leader who was created for the manœuvres of war, not for those of politics—politics which were always fatal to Generals who lost their way in them! There were, however, the examples of Dumouriez, Pichegru and Moreau; still more recently Cavaignac, Bedeau and Lamoricière had broken their backs on that fatal spring-board. But what warning, what voice, had awakened his torpid conscience? What! not once had he been moved by the distress, the hunger and misery of his soldiers! Never had the death-rattle in the throats of wounded reached his ears, never had he placed his foot within the hospitals or ambulances! Unknown even to the troops, passing in their midst, mysterious and without escort, quickly

withdrawing to his awe-inspiring house, he seemed to be unconcerned with all these sufferers who were in his keeping, with all these lives whose honour had been entrusted to him.

The faults and errors of each one did not cover his. In vain had he tried to take refuge behind those whom he had left in danger to be crushed. The law was formal. He commanded all, and he would pay for all. The doors of history were open before him—one led towards fields of laurels in the light, the other was half open upon a mysterious well.

He had chosen.

PART VI.

CHAPTER I.

‘HAVE you heard the news?’ said Restaud. ‘Changarnier is proceeding towards Corny. Frederick Charles consents to receive him.’

Du Breuil shook his head. All steps would be in vain. All the same, this abnegation of the old soldier, who was certainly a stranger to the catastrophe, was fine. But what bitter reflections he must be making—he, the hero of the Constantine retreat, the former Major of the 2nd Light Horse, formerly unbreakable under the shock of Arab charges, in the centre of his square—in thus going to beg for pity for one hundred and seventy-five thousand men! What a sad crowning of his career!

It was a day of anguish, a mournful day, passed with one's face to the window-panes, watching the rain falling, falling. In the midst of whisperings, incomplete phrases, deep silences, the minutes passed and passed, drawing out the sadness and melancholy. Floppe's pleasantries hung fire. Everyone in the dark room felt a deadly cold at his heart. Registers were closed, pens had rusted, desks were empty. Every now and then an order was copied, the leaves of a portfolio were turned over, and again there came the inaction which mortifies, the waiting which consumes.

About five o'clock the doors swung open. Laune, his face expressive of irritation, appeared. He threw off his streaming waterproof and placed some papers on a table. Ardent eyes scrutinized his face, and without uttering a word he came and went in the midst of general curiosity, striking the floor with his muddy heels. He could control himself no longer. He gave vent to his sorrow.

'They tell fine stories down there! Changarnier has returned. . . .' There was a solemn silence. 'It appears they received him admirably! . . . Two Aides-de-camp came to meet him, a Colonel, courteous men, but such courtesy! The Prince showed the greatest respect for the old gentleman, who is still quite flattered at it.'

'Flies are not caught with vinegar,' murmured Floppe.

The silence increased.

'In short,' uttered the lashing voice, 'the conditions are plain—complete surrender in the case of the army as in that of the town, capitulation pure and simple. Frederick Charles pretended that he is informed hour by hour of what passes among us. He said that secret councils, resolutions of the Council of War, the day even were known to him. He gave an account of such a speech or project which had been made. . . . "Your troops are famished, incapable of the least effort; mine await, standing at ease, for the end of the agony, which cannot be prolonged." And pointing out waggons full of supplies crowded on the line, he said: "Those are convoys which I have had brought here to revictual the army and the town, once the capitulation is signed."'

These words quivered like arrows in souls which were bleeding. The emotion was so infectious that even Massoli's face was harassed. Du Breuil and Restaud—shame on their cheeks!—exchanged long looks, which were charged with rage. Décherac, after a moment, asked:

'And that famous possibility of a sojourn in Algeria or on some spot of the territory? The army neutral, withdrawing with arms and baggage?'

'A chimera, like the rest,' exclaimed Laune. 'The enemy fears that there would be trouble with the population with whom we came into contact. They haven't confidence in the present Government. They complain of the conduct of the general officers, who, since Sedan, have not kept their engagements, who have commenced service again. . . . In a word, they are our master; they have us, and they will not let us go.'

'Then?' cried Décherac.

'Then,' continued Laune, in a deep voice, 'the Prince, with consideration, really with infinite consideration, gave Changarnier to understand the necessity of an immediate solution. "The step which you have taken itself proves the urgency. . . ." And that under penalty of compromising the

existence of so many thousands of men! At five o'clock, therefore, the chief of his staff, General von Stiehle, awaits on the line of outposts the negotiator chosen by the Marshal to settle questions of detail.'

All eyes turned towards the clock on the mantelpiece, which was striking five o'clock with a shrill note. One could have heard a pin drop.

'So that at this very minute,' concluded Laune, whose face, still injected with bile, paled, 'General de Cissey, gentlemen, is learning the hard conditions which the conqueror dictates to us.'

He became silent, there was a choking in his throat. Everyone thought over the same bitterness, and again silence reigned. The wind blew in squalls, the rain dashed against the windows, and for a long time each one heard, in the midst of the cold, the humidity, the blackness—heard like a distant roll veiled by crape—the funeral march which Laune was mechanically tapping out with his fingers on the window-panes.

The twilight entered by windows and the oozing doors, and through the bare walls. It rose from the ground, floated in the form of black draperies in the corners of the ceiling, insinuated itself into their hearts, froze feelings of mute revolt and bitter dreams. The light from the lamps did not succeed in dispersing its invisible presence.

It was a lugubrious evening, a mournful dinner. What news was General de Cissey going to bring back? Ah! undoubtedly only odious humiliation, meditated over and over again beforehand. To hope for other conditions, one must be mad! Du Breuil was astonished to find himself at table as usual. While eating, he thought of the anxious army, of the hundred thousand minds which were watching under the tents, of that immense emaciated crowd, soaked to the skin, which was shivering with hunger, fever, and hope, in the icy mud and in the icy darkness. Thus could they submit to such a sorrow and continue to live as though there was nothing, accomplish the same daily actions. . . . People around him were even in conversation. His eyes sought those of Restaud, and their distress was united.

Outside the rain was still falling. Black drops of water and cold wind struck them. They walked on in silence. Upon entering Mme. Guimbail's both sat down at a corner of the fireplace. Savage, their lips closed, they continued the

eternal contemplation of their troubles in the solitary room, lighted by a smoky candle.

Du Breuil thought with reprobation of the members of the council. Was not one of them, with awakened energy, at last going to cry the words which would relieve the universal weakness and cowardice? Dulled by old age and honours, they had first of all allowed themselves to be led astray by their attachment to the Empire, allowed themselves momentarily to doubt France, even to persuade themselves that Paris would not hold out. . . . Whence this indifference, this blind resignation, this kind of torpor and feebleness which had swallowed up the best? Peace was imminent. They would get out of the difficulty. . . . Du Breuil imagined their terrible start on the brink of the abyss suddenly yawning before them. They would doubtless rebel. Their long lives of bravery and honour were a guarantee for them. All of them—yes, all—would rise like one man after hearing Changarnier and De Cissey's reports, would strike the table with their fists, and, seizing the traitor by the collar. . . .

A secret voice at the bottom of his conscience protested. On the face of it nobody would act in that way. The secret voice added: because nobody has a right to do so. Feeling his reason shatter against the wall of the inflexible problem, Du Breuil, half mad, buried his face in his hands. Restaud, his eyes dry and shining, still kept silence. Thus they remained for hours, the silence of the room only broken by the streaming of the rain and the plaintive fury of the wind, which shook the doors and whistled in the chimney. The candle-end burnt itself out. Restaud left without unclenching his teeth. Never had they felt themselves to be so near or so far away in heart.

It was still raining the next morning, when, at the hour which had been fixed, the great chiefs appeared, followed by their orderly officers. One by one they entered the Marshal's house, where Changarnier and De Cissey had preceded them. Du Breuil, in his proper position, was present at the file past of the groups, with their bowed backs and pointed hoods, the steaming horses and the carriages splashed with mud. The solemnity of the circumstances gave a mournful grandeur to this ordinary spectacle. Clouds violently scudded across the gray sky. Shortly afterwards the officers came out again. Orderlies were walking the horses, for which they had been unable to find shelter, up and down by the bridle. As usual,

there was the confusion of mobs and meetings in the downpour before this closed house, where so many human destinies were at stake.

The result of the Changarnier and De Cissey missions was known: the town surrendered, the army a prisoner of war, colours, arms, baggage, and material in the hands of the conqueror.

'It is madness!' repeated Carrouge, scarlet with fury. 'Are we going to allow ourselves to be led to the slaughter-house like a flock of sheep?'

He was gesticulating in the middle of a group in which Du Breuil recognised De Cussac, who approved with his head, while he indignantly polished his eyeglass. Gex was smiling in a way which might be taken to be ironical or sorrowful, just as one pleased. He pointed to the impenetrable walls.

'I shouldn't like to be in my master's shoes,' he murmured. 'What step is to be taken?'

'There is only one,' exclaimed Francastel. 'In any and every case make a sortie, make a sortie!'

He was visibly excited. Gex's smile was emphasized, but voices were lowered upon the approach of a long, dry Captain. It was Captain de Verdier, one of Soleille's officers. His master's attachment to the Marshal's ideas made him regarded with suspicion. Du Breuil was moved by a downcast face and eyes in which appeared stupor and terror. A number of faces were thus desolated—faces of men condemned to death, up to that time asleep in the hope of reprieve and pardon, and which the ruddy dawn awakened, haggard.

The rain redoubled. The room of chief headquarters filled with Aides-de-camp. Those who were still working laid down their pens. All waited in a state of feverish impatience. Conversations, broken by silences, were resumed. . . . Eyes were turned towards the mysterious house. The sitting continued. Du Breuil felt Restaud's terribly anxious look resting upon him. At last, after three mortal hours, each one uttered a sigh of deliverance. Aides-de-camp rushed to their chiefs.

Although resigned beforehand to the worst news, it was with extreme dejection that in the afternoon they learnt the final resolutions taken by the Marshal.

'Bazaine has need to shield himself ceaselessly by the approval of the council, for he alone,' said Charlys—'he alone is responsible. The law recognises no other authority than that of the Commander-in-Chief.'

No, thought Du Breuil, each had a part in the responsibility—Canrobert, Lebœuf, Ladmirault, Frossard, Coffinières, and Soleille—all would be censured in the future for having remained silent, for having accepted this dishonour, this infamy, without revolt. A rumour was afloat, however, in praise of General Desvaux. He had uttered noble words, but nobody agreed to a desperate effort. The commander of the Guard had to accept the general decision, which was to surrender Metz at the same time as the army. The supplies reserved in case of siege would be placed at the disposal of all from that day. General Jarras, the council's delegate, in spite of his recriminations, was going to Frescati to draw up and sign a military convention.

The rain was still falling fast, streaming in cascades, or else, swept by the wind, passing in vapours. A dim light was over all things. A few officers were completing the work necessitated by the morning meeting.

Du Breuil collated the despatch to General Coffinières, intimating to him the order to place the last resources of the town at the disposal of the Commissary General of the army; he would see to their distribution. Hot discussions were continued around him.

'Well,' exclaimed Floppe, 'this is tough for men who formerly pushed from them *all conditions incompatible with our honour and the sentiment of military duty* !'

'I cannot see,' said Massoli, very dignified with his white hair, 'how an honourable convention, which you know they have been negotiating for a long time, can surprise you.'

Francastel, his moustache bristling, and a wild look in his eye, cried :

'An honourable convention ! Call things by their proper name ! Bazaine may be reluctant to pronounce the word capitulation, which takes the skin off his lips, but he will deceive nobody.'

'Finally,' continued Massoli, with serene tranquillity, 'what must we do, what can we do ?'

'Everything with the exception of what is being arranged !' howled Francastel. 'Is a pitched battle impossible ? Let brave men, officers and soldiers, concert ! We will break through the German lines. Better danger than a shameful captivity. And if we don't find leaders brave enough to place themselves at our head, then everyone for himself. We will break through all the same ! Hurrah for those who will

escape! The blood of the others will at least have washed the honour of the army! . . .'

'Always talking,' thought Du Breuil. 'You will be the first to be resigned!' And that spiteful fellow Floppe would also suffer the common lot, contenting himself with a very bitter witticism. As to Massoli, his canteens were ready. . . . But a doubt came over him. 'What must we do, what can we do?'

In the confusion of his thoughts he saw an obscure place where cross-roads met. He hesitated, lost. Which way was he to take? The same anguish was painted upon the faces of Décherac and Restaud; but the latter mastered himself by a violent effort, and deep faith shone from his pure eyes. He raised himself a thousand leagues above this discussion. Deaf to words which weaken, deaf to the very cry in his own heart, he was fervently celebrating his own sacrifice. A voluntary victim, he was sacrificing himself to the supreme religion of his life. With torn soul and closed mouth, he left the obscure cross-roads and struck off into the road of opprobrium, whence afar off his eyes of a believer distinguished the little altar-lamp. Du Breuil, indecisive, read in his eyes, this time shining, the humble and great thought—obey and be silent.

Such abnegation at that hour appeared to him above his own strength. He admired it in Restaud. He would have blamed it in himself. He said to himself, 'What is heroism in one may be cowardice in another.' He turned towards Décherac:

'It is true, we must make a passage sword in hand. . . . We shall find leaders! There are solemn circumstances in which obedience becomes an imposition. A General, responsible for thousands of men, is not bound down to the same slavery as the inferior officer or the soldier, who is responsible for himself alone. Duties change according to circumstances. Let us remember Napoleon's admirable words: "The sovereign or the country commands from the inferior officer and the soldier obedience towards their General in everything which conforms to the welfare or the honour of the service." And further on: "A General has received orders and instructions to employ his troops in the country's defence. How can he have authority to order his soldiers to give up their arms and to receive chains?"'

'Never will you find a General willing to compromise himself,' said Décherac, with a disabused smile. 'The habit of discipline little by little kills initiative, personal reflection and ardour.'

'I consider,' said Massoli, 'that one ought to resign one's self to things when one can do nothing. A sortie would simply bring about useless massacres, fresh hecatombs. Humanity and pity necessitate renouncing what would only be a glorious piece of folly.'

'Then be logical!' exclaimed Du Breuil dryly. 'Give up your rosette. The cross has two pieces of foolishness for a motto—honour and country. . . .'

'Massoli puts forward new theories,' railed Décherac. 'The town may be taken, so what is the good of enduring a siege? Why defend one's self in the open country since one can capitulate? . . . In future we shall consider the Captain who charges with his equipage rather than haul down his flag a fool, and the hero who gains a bloody victory a criminal. No more war, and no more army!'

'No more France!' replied Du Breuil.

They knew now a few details of the sitting. The council had received Changarnier's and Cisse's communications with painful surprise. But the fatal question was asked: What was to be done? Commissary of Stores Lebrun had stated there were no more supplies. Certain corps had had no bread for the past two days. The Guard could hold out until the 27th. The 3rd corps alone had a little bread. As to the town, Coffinières had said it could stand out until November 5th if left to itself. Horseflesh constituted almost the exclusive food for the troops. Their moral and physical state was growing worse every minute. General Soleille, circumspect as he always was, spoke last. A sortie seemed to him to be a veritable suicide. They had no right to condemn to certain death so many soldiers of whom France would later call for account; and as to the survivors, they would only present a spectacle of an army without discipline, ready to give way to the most regrettable excesses. . . . Consequently everything was said. They resolved only to ask for a detachment which would go to Algeria with arms and baggage, the honour which was refused to the whole army. They would also beg the enemy to allow the officers to retain their swords.

There were also other rumours, to which Du Breuil refused to attach any faith, although Floppe stated he had received the information from Jarras himself. One of the members of the council had asked if it would not be better to make the cannon and rifles useless, and to drown the powder. General Soleille had contended that, simply by having entered into negotiations,

the French army was pledged. Honour required that everything should be left in its present state. Besides, this work of destruction would be the signal for acts of insubordination. It was more dignified to accept misfortune in its entirety, *shielding themselves from the reproach of having acted in a manner contrary to loyalty*. That the whole council coolly listened to such monstrosities, and even approved of them, Du Breuil could not believe. And the proof was, he repeated, that General Desvaux, people said, had asked the Marshal upon leaving :

‘And the colours?’

‘Ah! true!’ Bazaine had cried; and he had immediately given orders to have them taken to the arsenal, where they would be burnt.

Hours passed in a state of infectious trepidation, a feverish trouble of feelings and ideas, without him noticing. Suddenly the door was pushed open by stout Captain Chagres. The rain came in from the outer darkness, and a gust of wind blew the papers across the room.

‘Well, Chagres,’ ejaculated Floppe, upon seeing Coffinières’ orderly officer, ‘what is it you don’t care a damn for to-day? Have you come from Metz? What weather, eh?’

‘I don’t care a damn for it,’ said Chagres staidly. ‘Where is Colonel Charlys?’

Since morning he was not to be found. Chagres brought Coffinières’ reply, acknowledging the receipt of the order relative to provisions. He gave the news of the town. At the close of the sitting of the Municipal Council, which the General had attended to announce the Marshal’s resolution to the inhabitants of Metz, the bad news had quickly passed from mouth to mouth. Crowds had formed. Everywhere were indignant outcries and threats. But the rain dispersed the groups, and all these fine revolts ended in silent consternation.

‘However, when I left the General’s house,’ he added, ‘a few enraged men were in the act of covering Fabert’s statue on the Place d’Armes with an immense black piece of crape. . . .’ He concluded philosophically: ‘They veil his face, and that satisfies them. . . .’

It was hardly five o’clock. It was pitch-dark outside. General Jarras’ safe-conduct arrived. The rain, which had been fine and persistent until then, commenced to fall in torrents. A terrific storm arose. The wind, with furious moans, shook the roofs. Projected with terrible force, the steaming water squirted in pointed fashion, crushing as it fell

in torrents. With ever-increasing violence the blind struggle of the unchained elements whirled in the black sky. Then, General Jarras, escorted by Lieutenant-Colonel Fay, and Major Samuel, who were to act as his secretaries, got into an old omnibus, to which two lean 'screws' were harnessed. Du Breuil watched the poor vehicle move away in the icy night, in the midst of the torrents of water which the storm brought in squalls. The destinies of the army and the town moved away at the same time under cover of the darkness. He imagined he was present at the suspicious departure of a clandestine interment. . . . Again the thought of the army haunted him. Still the rain fell, and the wind blew wildly. . . . Plank sheds collapsed in the mud; tent canvas was torn away and flapped like the débris of sails. . . . The whole night he saw this innumerable crowd rolled in its muddy shroud, sleeping in its sink the sleep of the brutes, or dreaming like himself, dead yet living.

A shivering, pale dawn came through the window-panes. Restaud, with drawn features, entered the room, followed by Décherac. Du Breuil sprang to his feet. Well? . . . Neither Restaud nor Décherac had slept a wink. As the latter lodged in the same house as Major Samuel, he had been the first to hear the news upon that officer's return at three o'clock in the morning. It had been impossible to get to sleep again.

He spoke of the slowness of the journey in the rain to Metz, the broken windows of the omnibus, the horses refusing to advance. At the Porte de France the three officers waited in vain, the wind preventing the shouts of the sentinels from reaching the doorkeeper. They succeeded at last in finding another carriage, and at ten o'clock they left the town. At the outposts they got out, and a violent wind, which was driving cold hail before it, extinguished the lantern. They walked on like machines, their heads buried in their hoods. Suddenly there was a 'Wer da!' It was the enemy's outpost.

'In short,' said Décherac, 'they reached Frescati. Jarras and Stiehle for a long time discussed in one of the rooms, while Samuel and Fay waited two mortal hours in the adjoining drawing-room, silent, face to face with officers of the German staff. They were summoned in turn. Stiehle commenced to dictate the clauses upon which Jarras and he had just come to an understanding.'

Du Breuil and Restaud looked at each other.

'Article 1st,' continued Décherac, after a short silence, 'the French Army is a prisoner of war. Article 2nd, the fortress and the town of Metz, with all the forts, the material of war, supplies of all kinds, and everything which is the property of the State, will be surrendered on Saturday, the 29th, at noon, to the Prussian Army in the condition which it was at the time of the signing of the convention. . . . The discussion of Article 3rd was resumed. "In recognition of the courage of the French army, it was stipulated, the King authorizes those officers who will undertake not to serve against Germany until the end of the war to return home with their swords."'

'Oh,' said Du Breuil, his face purple.

'Yes, it is a singular way of recognizing the army's courage! . . . Fay and then Samuel bravely protested. Why not accord the whole army the honours of war, the last defile? Stiehle categorically refused. He also refused to let all the officers have their swords. "I will refer the matter to the Marshal," Jarras said. Stiehle appeared very irritated. "What!" he cried, "we shall not sign to-night?" Finally, after a long debate, Article 3rd was drawn up in two ways—one granting and the other not granting honours. Stiehle even asked: "How would you that your troops should defile in such weather, and over such roads, numerous as they are?" And Fay, on the spot, drew up some routes. They made a rendezvous for to-day. Stiehle wanted it for the morning, but it was already two o'clock. Samuel drew near to Jarras, murmuring: "Don't fix an hour, try to gain time. . . ."'

'Parbleu!' said Du Breuil.

'All the more so,' resumed Décherac, 'as yesterday, before setting off, Samuel, fancy to yourself, was translating newspapers in Bazaine's office. . . . Commissary General Lebrun entered, crying: "Good news, Monsieur le Maréchal! We have still provisions for four days!" But Stiehle insisted, and they sign at five o'clock this evening.'

It was now almost daylight. A gray morning, drowned in fog, emerged. All three looked at their cadaverous faces in the livid light. Décherac shook Du Breuil and Restaud by the hands, and left with an anxious gesture. When alone the two friends could not find a word to say. Phrases rose, however, to their lips. Dissent and complaints filled their souls. Words stuck in their throats. At last Restaud asked:

'I shall see very little of you to-day? You are going to Metz?'

To Metz. . . . Ah! yes, the funeral of Major de Sahuqué. . . . He was one of Du Breuil's friends, nursed at the Grand Seminary; a Major in the Cuirassiers of the Guard, who had been wounded like a brave man in the Rezonville charge, and who had died like a Christian on the previous day.

'I shall return immediately,' he murmured.

They were thinking of the possibilities which lurked in the formidable unknown of these twenty-four hours. That evening the capitulation signed, to-morrow the funereal preparations, and, hovering over each minute, the inverse flight of their thoughts, one all revolt, the other all discipline. Under Restaud's attitude, unyielding owing to savage will power, his mind inflexibly made up to submit and be silent, Du Breuil thought he could distinguish an affectionate censure.

'Au revoir,' he said suddenly; 'I'm going to bury this unfortunate man.'

Restaud shook his head, then, with terrible bitterness, he said:

'You mean to say that fortunate man!'

CHAPTER II.

A NUMBER of officers had assembled at the Chapel of the Grand Seminary. The gigantic statures of the survivors of the charge rose in the front rank. Couchorte dominated them by a head. And behind gold and silver epaulets, humble epaulets of red wool also pressed, good, big Cuirassiers, very thin, who had come there because they loved their chief. In addition, there were all the able-bodied wounded of the establishment, a few civilians, and some priests. Du Breuil was not surprised to see Judin, who he knew to be a friend of the deceased. They shook hands in silence. A little red ribbon, the colour of spilt blood, ornamented the Viscount's fashionable coat. Suddenly, upon turning his head, Du Breuil's heart received a little shock. D'Avol was behind them.

He felt a mortal trouble come over him. His internal wound quivered. The last few days it had somewhat healed. So many sorrows! . . . To think of it had reopened it. An intolerable pain shot through him. His wounded friendship bled.

The bald-headed priest, wearing a black chasuble, was earnestly mumbling the words of the gradual: *In memoria æterna erit justus*. . . . The altar and catafalque candles, a coffin on trestles, shone. An odour of wax and incense impregnated the somewhat stifling atmosphere in which each one was unbending himself in meditation.

Du Breuil experienced only a feeling of aversion and rancour. Offences, misunderstandings, then bitterness and secret hostility, finally evident unfriendliness with words which cut and thoughts which poison, he lived over again, in a second, hours of suffering. The abscess burst in an outburst of hatred. Hatred all the more bitter as it was poisoned with affection. Anine's pure face was mingled with it painfully.

In the silence, broken by coughs and the clanking of swords, the priest's voice intoned the terrible hymn:

'Dies iræ, dies illa,
Solvat sæclum in favilla. . . .'

Du Breuil found himself a young man again, in the days when he still went to church, moved by the incomparable splendour of the Catholic ritual. The same emotion was softening the majority of those rude military faces. They were thinking, in connection with themselves, of the various events in life and death which religion accompanied. Emotion hovered over the melancholy stanzas. In the Latin tongue the trumpets of the Last Judgment rang out:

'Tuba mirum spargens sonum
Per sepulchra regionum,
Coget omnes ante thronum.'

Yes, the century was crumbling into dust. That death, to which they had consecrated themselves by their profession, was there, crouching around them, within them. Du Breuil, horrified, felt the passing breath of the invisible Mower. The Borny battlefield stretched out under the moon its harvest of corpses. The battlefields of Gravelotte, Rezonville, Mars-la-Tour, Amanvillers, Saint-Privat, and Servigny, appeared before him, ploughed up with shells, and sown over with bones. The rich, ruddy soil of Lorraine turned his stomach. Through the walls he breathed a pestilential musty smell, which was the breath even of Metz, of the streets infected with phenol and chlorine, and of the stinking cemeteries. And he, Du Breuil, was dying like the others. Ah! war, the horrible, odious

thing! It had taken Lacoste from him. It had taken D'Avol from him living. He felt himself miserable and alone.

A bell tinkled. There was a movement of chairs, a bowing forward of heavy shoulders and bronzed faces. Some knelt down. One enormous Cuirassier, above bowed foreheads, ostentatiously stuck out his chest as though for a challenge. The bell still tinkled in the deep silence. . . . Then they heard an abrupt chuckle. It was Couchorte who, tossing his head, was giving vent to his pride. They tried to lead him out, but he made a sign that they were to leave him alone. It was nothing; he was already getting better.

With instinctive repulsion, Du Breuil felt D'Avol's breath on his back. He only had to turn round and their hands might have clasped, their eyes might have penetrated into each other as in former times. But an irresistible force riveted him to his seat. Every second the gulf between them increased. The priest, who had come down from the altar, pronounced the absolution. Athwart the sacramental words shone a corner of heaven: *Requiem æternam dona ei, Domine. . . . Et lux perpetua luceat ei. . . .* Then he psalmodized, in a plain-chant voice, the supreme cry, *De profundis*, and the words were lost in a mute prayer. . . . Finally, he raised the silver holy-water sprinkler, for the quadruple gesture which nails to coffins an imaginary cross.

Those present filed out. Du Breuil was about to follow when the noise of a disturbance arose. He saw Couchorte struggling between two officers. The giant was speaking with volubility, his eyes starting out of his head:

'Cavalry is a first-rate fighting tool! Trumpet sound to saddle at six o'clock. . . . We are betrayed, dishonoured! . . . Sabre in hand!'

He had half drawn his sword. Foaming at the mouth, he was challenging Bismarck, and, on the threshold of the chapel, he was still shouting in a harsh voice:

'For the attack! . . . Charge!'

They led him away.

The shock to Du Breuil's disordered nerves was so great that again he experienced a loathing of life. War intoxicated him with disgust. This time he descended to the very depths of misery and solitude. He found himself outside. Judin's voice called to him:

'Pierre!'

Maxime was talking with D'Avol. . . . It was, indeed, the

familiar silhouette, tall and slender, the self-willed wrinkle on the forehead, the concentrated ardour in the eyes! It was, indeed, the same Jacques he had always known, always loved! . . . And now they were enemies! Du Breuil, in his love of loving, in his native egoism, suffered to the full. Could they never, then, understand each other, support and aid each other? . . . Why cut in this way the poor bonds of affection which connect one to life? Life was so sad, so precarious! . . . Bashfully, he loyally held out his hand to D'Avol. . . . Jacques, with a disdainful gesture, gave his—'What is the good?' said his icy look. . . . Du Breuil imagined he might have been shaking a piece of rag. The contact of this soft thing, the soul of which was absent, was to him a supreme laceration, an atrocious wound, caused by rage and humiliation.

'You'll take luncheon with me?' said Judin to them.

No. D'Avol had business elsewhere; he thanked him in a trenchant tone, and, with intractable face, parted company without further farewell.

'What a bear!' exclaimed Judin.

Du Breuil let himself drift—be led away.

'You're going to see, Pierre, how curious the Hôtel du Nord is at this time.' And, in the presence of the sullen silence of his friend, Judin added: 'You'll find there a few men of courage. Brave fellows like Clinchant, Boissonnet, Charlys, Barrus, Carrouge, Rossel, Cremer. . . . The first demonstration against Bazaine took place yesterday. A Captain in the Carabineers gave it a start. The Majors of the National Guard have promised their support. It's a long time, however, since that has been in preparation. Ladmirault and Changarnier did well to refuse to take the head of the movement. Thank God there are other generals! First of all, Clinchant. They speak also of Boisjol. . . . Are you with them?'

Du Breuil, agitated with hope, seized hold of the idea. Judin continued:

'You don't know anything, then? Hasn't Charlys asked you to sign the small paper? He is one of the leaders! . . . But he only wants to make a sortie, that is to say, what honour commands, eh?'

Du Breuil gravely made a sign of acquiescence. Restaud's thought, however, troubled him.

'A few of the discontented go further,' continued Judin.

'These speak of nothing less than deposing the Marshal, and offering the command to the worthiest.' He winked. 'D'Avol, Barrus, and others that you know, preach that way. All the same, it's a little severe.'

Du Breuil was thinking. The Provisional Government, on September 4th, did nothing else but that. The Empire itself was born from a *coup d'état*. There was not a power which had not sprung from violence, and was not based on disdain for laws which until then had been considered good. But a secret voice whispered to him: 'Let ambitious men think thus. Obey and keep silent. Unless an army is disciplined it has no *raison d'être*. Its grandeur and force is the result alone of deaf, dumb, blind discipline.' . . . Again the cry of common-sense dominated: Passive obedience to-day would be a crime. When a general-in-chief loses his head, neglects his duties, and surrenders his troops, the subalterns should take counsel only of their courage and attachment to the country. . . .

'The officers of the Engineers,' said Judin, 'have persuaded Colonel Boissonnet to place himself at their head. As soon as Clinchant has twenty thousand men he will take the general command. Meeting at one o'clock this afternoon to count. . . . You will number thirty thousand to-morrow!'

Yes, it was deliverance, salvation! Du Breuil, with feverish joy, imagined that he could at last discern his true duty. Let D'Avol and Barrus conspire after their own fashion! Let Bazaine and his generals cowardly stretch out their necks towards the final *carcan*! He, Du Breuil, an obscure soldier of the sacred battalion, far removed from these guilty plots as from this ignominy, would proceed down the bloody road with head on high. The sun of France shone brilliantly at the end!

Then again he saw Restaud's ardent face, his eyes of a fanatic, in which danced the light of the far-off little altar-lamp. How far, he thought, could the strictness of a principle lead one!

After luncheon, consisting of stewed horse, horse steaks, and horse pie—'You are requested to bring your own bread' was the recommendation on white notices stuck on the mirrors—the large room of the café commenced to fill. More than sixty officers crowded there already.

'Ah, there you are, Du Breuil! That's good, friend,' said Charlys, warmly shaking hands.

He showed a tired face, sparkling eyes, hollow cheeks. His large body was slightly bowed. He had passed the afternoon of the previous day in making journeys, applications, in recruiting adherents. He appeared somewhat sad, as though he doubted beforehand of success. Du Breuil shook Carrouge and Barrus by the hand.

‘We must act without delay,’ continued Charlys.

‘Is it true,’ uttered Barrus, ‘that there are still four days’ provisions?’

‘Yes,’ said Charlys. ‘I was with Samuel in Bazaine’s office when the Commissary General of Stores came to announce it. Lebrun affirmed that with what remains hidden away in Metz, with the thirteen thousand living horses, one can hold out still longer. Do you know what reply the Marshal made? “What has that to do with me, Commissary of Stores? If you had provisions for a fortnight, it wouldn’t alter the situation. *Pourparlers* are opened. We must finish with this, and get away.”’

‘Death to the traitor!’ came from the stentorian voice of the Captain of Carabineers who had distinguished himself on the previous day by his virulence.

‘He’s throwing the mask off now!’ growled Carrouge. ‘You should have heard him five days ago, when Lapasset went to see him! One of the General’s Aides-de-camp told me this. Lapasset wished to make a sortie with his brigade. Bazaine was already informed of that. “Lapasset, come now!”’ Carrouge imitated the Marshal’s good-natured tone, his crafty frankness. “No rashness, no individual action!” At that moment Canrobert entered. The General making as if to withdraw through deference, Bazaine resumed: “No, remain! Lapasset, you’re welcome!” And, taking a map, he made them sit down. Then, turning towards Canrobert, he said: “Marshal, I’m in a cruel perplexity. I haven’t the slightest news of Boyer or the Empress; provisions are lacking; we must make a sortie!” Bending over the map, he said: “It will be for Monday. You, Marshal, will be the right column, and will take the Cheminot road. Lebœuf will form the left column, and will follow the Strasburg road. I shall be in the centre, with the Lapasset brigade to assist both. But we must not hide one thing: safety is in our legs. Woe to him who falls, for he won’t be picked up! . . . The direction? Château-Salins. . . . Once there, I will decide. . . . We shall have almost no artillery or provisions. But I repeat, our

safety will be in our legs." And when Lapasset, transported, cried, "Thanks, Marshal! We are the last French army. If we must fall, may posterity, at least, uncover before us! . . ." he replied: "No; we shall break through in a body. Come, we shall not die!" And in conclusion he said: "You understand the gravity of these words, gentlemen? I needn't advise you to keep secret. Go to your quarters, and await my orders." Now, Monday,' concluded Carrouge, 'was the 24th, the day upon which news of Boyer was received, the day upon which the final decision was taken: Let us capitulate!'

'Tartuffe!' gnashed Barrus. 'He has no more moral sense than a pebble.'

'Only lay the blame on yourselves, gentlemen democrats!' jeered Carrouge. 'You wanted him for a leader, and you have him.'

'We will depose him!' said Barrus, whose eyes were sparkling.

'Shoot him!' gesticulated the Carabineer. 'There are several who need a little lead in their heads.'

A Lieutenant of Voltigeurs was perorating in the middle of a group.

'First of all, we must replace all the members of the council. Canrobert, Lebœuf, and Frossard are sold to the Empire. Coffinières is treading in their footsteps. Only Ladmirault is sound. As to Soleille'—he made a movement in imitation of a head which falls—'into the basket! . . . Appoint me Captain, and I'll undertake to raise my company!'

Du Breuil recognised Marquis's shrill voice and silly smile. Colonel Boissonnet stood aside with some officers of the Engineers. He perceived Rossel, determination in his obstinate eyes, Captain Cremer, Clinchant's Aide-de-camp—the General had been unable to come—and Captain de Serres. The last-named came and saluted Du Breuil.

'Major D'Avol was, unfortunately, on duty,' he announced. 'He will be consoled by making proselytes.'

Lieutenant Thomas shot a look of approval from his red eye. Major Leperche, Bourbaki's Aide-de-camp, who wished at all costs to rejoin his chief, was making a great fuss. The uproar increased. Discussions became virulent. Charlys in vain asked for silence, begged that they count themselves. . . . Time was pressing if they wished to make a sortie in a body! . . . Recriminations and complaints came from all sides. This one should be dismissed, that one should be exalted. An

enthusiast jumped on to a table, and offered himself as General-in-Chief. Charllys decided that they meet the next day in the offices of the Engineers at the Esplanade to finish coming to an understanding. One by one the superior officers went off, leaving Captains and Lieutenants to continue in the midst of cries, like big children, their sterile debates.

Du Breuil entered the Ban Saint-Martin with death in his soul. Must they, then, renounce the glorious hope of a sortie? So many good intentions ended in this—this market of interests, this mess! He imagined he could see in it the inevitable effect of a first breach of discipline, and with all his rage he cursed the traitors who had placed before him this horrible alternative of failing in his duties or accepting dishonour.

Shortly before reaching the staff offices he nearly ran up against a long, dry man at the corner of a small, muddy street, which was overlooked by General Soleille's house. Surprised in the midst of their thoughts, they looked at each other. He recognised Captain de Verdier, whose downcast face had moved him on the previous day. The Aide-de-camp seemed to be a prey to a terrible distress. As Du Breuil spontaneously held out his hand to him, the unfortunate man, yielding to an irresistible need to make confidences, suddenly unbosomed himself in a flow of words. He would have made them to the first-comer. His loquacity relieved him.

He would never survive such dishonour! The immense material of the army and the forts: mitrailleuses, cannon, rifles, more than twenty million projectiles—all that given up to the enemy without reserve! What was more, even before the signing of the capitulation, making them the masters of these treasures, those accountable for them striving to preserve them intact! A French General yielding to this aberration, owing one knows not to what unacknowledgable scruples! And he, he, De Verdier, obliged to write these shameful orders with his own hands! . . . They might talk about inventories and restitution after the war! All those were lies! Never would the Germans give up a bit.

'You can believe me or not, as you like, Major, but just now, at the meeting of Generals of artillery, Soleille sharply censured General de Berckheim for having made the mitrailleuses of the 6th corps useless. Censured! yes, censured! an act of simple military duty which the whole army ought to imitate!'

'And the colours?' asked Du Breuil.

De Verdier paled.

‘That is enough to make one mad! . . . We informed the commanders of the corps this morning that, by the Marshal’s orders, they had to have them taken to the Arsenal. Colonel de Girels, the Governor, also received the order to preserve them. They will form part of the inventory drawn up by a commission of French and Prussian officers.’

He burst into a harsh laugh. Du Breuil, stupefied, moved away. Each minute which slipped by was a small part of himself, which went away and was dissolved. All his ideas of honour heavily flew away. What madness, then, had taken possession of these men?

An unusual commotion surprised him when passing before Bazaine’s house. There was the same uproar at headquarters. A great quantity of decorations had been given out in the morning. Some of them had bespattered the staff. Francastel was sporting a new pelisse with four galloons. A new cross shone on Massoli’s breast. He carried his head high with modesty, every now and then casting a satisfied look at his rosette.

‘It finished by coming, and not too soon,’ he replied to Du Breuil’s brief compliment.

Francastel rushed towards his former chief, and, taking his hands, shook them familiarly. He was more than ever resolved to make a sortie! He had even been present, he declared with unbelievable impudence, at the great afternoon meeting at the Hôtel du Nord. Everything was going well.

Du Breuil, who did not remember having seen him, was sickened, and turned his back. Restaud, Décherac, and Laune were not at headquarters, so there were few friendly faces. He made himself acquainted with events from stout Jacquemère, whose inflammation was again troubling him. Not very much was known. In the afternoon Jarras had received a letter from General von Stiehle, announcing that honours of war would be accorded to the French army, and that all the officers would be allowed their swords. He had immediately set off with Samuel and Fay for Frescati. Colonel Nugues was replacing him. That was all. Ah yes, there was something else! . . . Captain de Mornay-Soult, on behalf of the Marshal, had come to tell Nugues, a quarter of an hour ago, to conclude a letter dealing with current matters, which was going to be sent to the commanders of the corps, with the following postscriptum: ‘In giving the order to take the colours to the Arsenal, the statement that they will be

burnt there was omitted in error.' Nugues, surprised—since nobody had heard of this first order!—had gone for information to Bazaine. . . .

'A big piece of news!' ejaculated a voice. It was Floppe, who had returned from the bivouacs of the Guard. 'There is some squabbling down there. An order from the artillery, prescribing the deposit of the colours, had turned the Picard division upside down. Colonel Péan has just broken his eagle. I saw the staff sawn up and the silk torn. The Grenadiers are dividing the pieces between them.'

Joy rose in Du Breuil's heart. Had Bazaine, then, reflected? A remnant of shame was palpitating in this soul of mud. . . .

'They say,' continued Floppe, 'that Desvaux, on the application of General Picard, has asked His Excellency by letter for explanations!'

All eyes were turned towards the door. Colonel Nugues entered. He held in his hand the minutes of two orders.

'Write, gentlemen,' he said to the officers on duty.

'To the Commanders of the Army Corps.'

'Have the kindness to give orders that the eagles of the infantry regiments of your army corps be collected early to-morrow morning . . .'

('Why to-morrow?' thought Du Breuil. 'If they wish to destroy them before the capitulation, there is not a minute to be lost.')

' . . . early to-morrow morning by your artillery commander and taken to the Metz Arsenal. You will inform the chiefs of the corps that they will be burnt there. These eagles, enclosed in their cases, will be carried in a closed waggon. The Governor of the Arsenal will receive them, and will deliver a receipt for them to the corps.

(Signed) BAZAINE.'

'One!' said Colonel Nugues; 'now for the other.'

'To General Coffinières, Governor of Metz.'

'Have the kindness to give orders that the Metz Arsenal receive to-morrow morning the eagles of the infantry regiments of all the army corps. . . .'

The clear voice separated the words in the midst of silence. One heard the pens gliding over the paper. At the same time

a secretary of the staff was marking a registry in the correspondence book.

‘But they do not order him to have the eagles burnt,’ remarked Du Breuil, when the order was dictated.

‘Coffinières doubtless knows all about it,’ replied Colonel Nugues. ‘“It is useless to say anything else to him,” the Marshal clearly stated. And in the case of Soleille he added: “Don’t write to him. He may make difficulties. I intend to write to him when the moment arrives.”’

Officers and secretaries had put down their pens, and with raised heads were waiting for the order to read over what they had written.

‘You, Massoli,’ said Nugues.

In a monotonous voice, and in the midst of general indifference, the stout man read over again:

‘Have the kindness to give orders that the eagles of the infantry regiments——’

‘It is inconceivable!’ said Du Breuil to himself. He again saw Verdier with his bewildered eyes murmuring the strange confidence that a formal order to make an inventory of the colours had been given in the morning to Colonel de Girels. Bazaine’s fresh orders could only, then, be a manœuvre to deceive the commanders of the corps, to calm the army’s emotion, but leaving its detestable effect on primitive order. This idea was confirmed within him. First of all the transport of the eagles put off until the next day. Between now and then the capitulation would have taken place! Then silence on the subject of the burning in the letter to Coffinières. Consequently Girels would confine himself to storing them in the Arsenal. And this way of acting towards Soleille. ‘He may make difficulties!’ . . . Unworthy speech for a man who, sure of absolute obedience, of the complicity of his subordinate, still sought to give himself the leading rôle at the expense of his neighbour.

Like so many flashes these thoughts tore his soul. But they were only a small part of his sorrows and troubles; they quickly passed. Other thoughts immediately followed—Lacoste! Restaud! D’Avol! Anine! He wandered about for a long time in the rain and the mud. The autumn wind carried away the clouds; the last leaves turned somersaults in the air soaked in water. Interminable hours of agony passed. Evening, like a tombstone, at last fell.

Eight o’clock was striking when he found himself in his

room, where a good fire was burning. A noise behind the partition told him that Restaud was there. He knocked several times on the wall. After a moment the door opened and Restaud appeared. His boots covered with mud, his soaked clothes, and his face discomposed with fatigue, showed that he also had been walking for a long time without plan or purpose. He sat down near the fireplace, and then said, in a voice which wished to appear gay :

‘ You’re very comfortable.’

Mme. Guimbail, by a touching attention, had given to Frisch some old pieces of wood studded with nails, although her small stock had diminished. She came herself to place them in the room, to prepare the fire and to light the lamp.

‘ Bless me, it’s true!’ exclaimed Du Breuil, who only just noticed it. He drew up some chairs, and they crouched in a chilled fashion in the semicircular flood of light. The flame darted out its golden tongues, licking the wet wood, which groaned and smoked, or else, crackling, sent forth jets of blue, scarlet, and yellow sunlight. They looked at it in silence.

‘ At this hour,’ said Du Breuil at last, ‘ everything must be concluded. We are doubtless prisoners.’

Restaud sharply raised his head, and, as though he was going to meet the struggle, said :

‘ Well?’

‘ Do you accept that?’ murmured Du Breuil, with a bitter smile.

‘ There is a kind of joy in the accomplishment of the worst duty,’ replied Restaud hardly.

‘ It remains to be known what is one’s true duty,’ said Du Breuil.

‘ Does a soldier ask that?’ cried Restaud, with indignant sorrow.

Du Breuil reflected a moment.

‘ You are right,’ he declared. ‘ There is only one duty, just as there is only one honour. . . . It is not the first time, unfortunately, that a French army has capitulated. Recollect Dupont, at Baylen! Twenty-five thousand men surrendered to the Spaniards without a fight. Only Major de Sainte-Église declared there were no longer any orders to be received from a General who was a prisoner. He brought back his battalion to Madrid, and the Emperor made him a Colonel on the spot.’

'He ought to have made him a General,' said Restaud, 'and then shot him.'

'Ah yes!' railed Du Breuil. 'Always your system! . . . Passive obedience, resignation. I know—I know! No, friend. In a situation like ours the resolution to die is alone worthy and salutary.'

He rose to his feet with a bound, took the tattered seventh volume of Napoleon's 'Mémoires,' and read in a feverish voice: "'What apparently impossible things have been done by resolute men with no other resources than death.'" . . .'

'And he is a judge,' continued Du Breuil, 'one does not challenge.'

'Yes,' said Restaud. 'Pride blinds him. . . . What you take for the cry of honour is only the cry of pride. Now, a soldier like you and I, a simple figure, ought not to have pride. Such a death would be foolish, because a soldier is not responsible for the faults of his chief; it would be a crime, because he can no more dispose of his death than of his life. And do you think such a renunciation is not without terrible torture? . . . But rest assured our sacrifice will be counted. The bitterest duty bears fruit, and what we have sown we shall some day gather in.'

Du Breuil looked at Restaud's face, and recollecting the unfruitful afternoon meeting, he sat down again with a discouraged air.

'Listen, my poor friend,' continued Restaud; 'let us bet that you arrived at nothing to-day?'

Du Breuil kept silent. It was painful to admit the failure of his dream, the vain tumult of the meeting, the postponement of projects until the next day.

'Your silence answers,' said Restaud. 'You were one hundred to-day; you will be ten to-morrow. Such undertakings are condemned beforehand.'

'No,' protested Du Breuil. 'There are already more than five thousand adherents. And if we were only one hundred, only ten, we ought to make a sortie, all the same.'

'I cannot admit that,' declared Restaud. 'Yesterday when you spoke of making a sortie in a body, I respected your chimera. "We shall be twenty thousand," you said, and you counted on finding a leader. You see, not one has dared to violate the terrible rule. And now you are going to fall back on individual effort, but in this case I affirm to you with all my friendship that you are on the wrong track.'

‘Why?’

‘Because the same chain binds all of us. Nobody has a right to avoid the common humiliation and pain. The foetid water and the black bread must be divided until it is finished. Think of the unfortunate soldiers! We brought them here; we must not leave without them. Are we going to abandon them—we, the sheep-dogs—when they are going to drag themselves along by thousands over the roads of Germany?’

‘We can make ourselves more useful elsewhere.’

Restaud shook his head:

‘Your place is in their midst. Think well about it, my dear fellow. There is a sacred obligation above ideas and personal suffering—the solidarity of misfortune. To flee from it is desertion.’

‘You need not say any more about it,’ sighed Du Breuil, who was, however, shaken. ‘It is terrible!’

Restaud took his hand, looked in his eyes, and, in a broken voice, simply said:

‘Yes.’

The fire was burning out; it consisted of brands from which every now and then twisted a thin flame, incandescent embers downy with bluish ashes. They followed the dying reflection with their thoughts. They remained thus, in a state of silent stupor, for a long time. About eleven o’clock the rumbling of a vehicle dragged them from it. The fire was extinguished.

‘There they are!’ exclaimed Du Breuil, jumping up.

Both shivered at the thought of this cab which was carrying through the night the sentence of the town and the army.

‘We must go for news,’ said Restaud sharply, as though he had retained a ray of hope.

Outside the icy humidity penetrated them. The wind was still blowing. Pelting rain. Their lantern several times almost went out. Du Breuil, whose fingers were numbed, had to shield it with his cloak. They advanced with difficulty, being up to the ankles in liquid mud. At last they reached the house occupied by Décherac. The door was wide open, as though death had just entered. They found their comrade seated in the dark on one of the staircase steps.

‘Samuel has just arrived,’ he said. ‘He is in his room there. He won’t see anybody.’

In the light of the lantern his face appeared very pale. This time his smile was shrivelled up by rage. In short, bitter phrases, he detailed what he knew. It was finished, signed,

settled! The army, the town, were surrendered prisoners! . . . As a peace ransom, the officers might take their baggage into Germany! They could even keep their swords, since that pleased them. As to those who undertook no longer to serve in the war, they were free . . . Bazaine allowed them to go. Frederick Charles begged them to do so. . . . They recognised the courage of the French army in consequence! . . . Décherac jeered. But there was a still more dishonouring clause! Bazaine refused—yes, refused—the honours of war which had been asked for on the previous day with so many earnest entreaties, and which had at last been accorded in answer to their prayers!

‘What!’ cried Du Breuil. ‘The only compensation!’

‘Yes,’ said Décherac. ‘Does that astonish you? It doesn’t me.’ He smiled heartrendingly. ‘Not such a fool as to defile more than one hundred thousand armed men, still capable of brandishing a sword or a rifle, before an enemy the very sight of which would have maddened these unfortunates! . . . But what he refused for all he might, don’t you think, have asked for a few. Honour was safe . . . only he never thought of it. . . . No! Imagine the stupefaction of Stiehle himself when Jarras declared that Bazaine saw difficulties in the way of the execution of the clause! . . . “What difficulties?” asked Stiehle. And Jarras stammered: “The weather is bad, the ground and the roads deplorable. . . . It will doubtless be difficult to defile. . . .” To which Stiehle replied: “These considerations never exist in the case of the Prussian army.” Then Jarras proposed, while renouncing the defile, to specify all the same in the document that honours of war were accorded. “Let us write it down,” he said, “but do not let us carry it out.” But Stiehle declared: “That which is written will be executed.”’

Du Breuil sought for Restaud’s face in the darkness. His head was obstinately bowed. His hands hanging down alone slightly trembled.

‘And do you know,’ continued Décherac, ‘one of the motives for which Bazaine no longer wishes this “formality”? I wonder if you can guess it? The difficulty of contenting the Generals in regard to their positions in consequence of the difference in their ranks and personal situations! . . . But the true motive, the one which he has been unable to say, is his shame of reappearing before the army, his fear of our insults and our scorn.’

‘Assuredly,’ said Du Breuil, ‘he would have proudly filed past the first had he done everything which honour and duty requires. He judges and condemns himself by his refusal.’

‘That is not all,’ exclaimed Décherac. ‘There are the colours. Has not this gloomy imbecile taken care to draw the enemy’s attention to them! By his orders, Jarras informed Stiehle that there would not be very many eagles to give up, alleging that the custom of troops in our unfortunate country was to burn the flag upon the occasion of each new Government. Stiehle naturally smiled. “No, General, I don’t believe that that has been done. But it is quite understood that everything which remains—colours as well as material—is ours.” And what is more equivocal,’ concluded Décherac, ‘is that, in giving Jarras his instructions before leaving, Bazaine added: “I know there are some colours burnt, and I don’t want Prince Frederick Charles to accuse me of having broken my engagements.”’

There was deep silence. After a moment, Décherac resumed :

‘But the worst is that in drawing up the appendix—a series of articles concerning Metz which were proposed by Coffinières—Stiehle commenced to speak of the measures which the Prussian authorities intended to take for the transport of the prisoners. Once our troops were conducted to the German lines by their officers, the latter would first of all be evacuated. “As to the eighty thousand soldiers,” he added. . . . “But there are many more,” protested Jarras. “Yes, I know, with the invalids and wounded. . . .” “No, not at all,” repeated Jarras. “There are a hundred and twenty-six thousand combatants, without counting the Metz garrison, the invalids, and the wounded—more than a hundred and sixty thousand men.” Stiehle contented himself by replying: “Really, is that possible?” Stupor, which was depicted on his face, said more than words. . . .’

‘Really, is that possible?’ They felt these words like the burning of a red-hot iron.

Décherac rose abruptly.

‘Au revoir, gentlemen,’ he exclaimed. ‘Good luck!’

They redescended the staircase, plunging into the darkness and the rain. Du Breuil was bathed in cold perspiration. Had they at last drained the cup? Could they descend deeper into ignominy? Then all the plotting in connection with the colours appeared before him; they were a package to be sent

to Berlin; to-morrow morning they would be taken to the Arsenal, intact in their closed waggons. If some of them unfortunately escaped, Bazaine was excused beforehand. . . . Pugh! he put his foot in a rut. The mud splashed in his face. Restaud, with his face turned away, was walking by his side. They advanced in silence, lashed in the face by a wind mingled with rain.

The lantern sent out a troubled light, which made the surrounding night appear darker. . . . Du Breuil saw once more a similar light. It was swinging in the hand of a man of the guard; it guided him in a starlit night towards Lacoste's room; it revealed a barracks full of men and horses asleep in their force. The arms shone, and in the hoarse breathing of the Lancers was the energy of France. . . .

A gust of wind blew out the flame.

They found themselves plunged in an ocean of darkness, in which they distinguished neither heaven nor earth. Groping and stumbling, it seemed to them that they were foundering in the wind, the rain, and the mud. The mud—how they were sinking in it! . . . It clasped them, rose, filled their mouths, eyes, and ears. . . . Like a drowning man, Du Breuil in a flash lived over again so many feverish days from the illusions at the commencement to the downfall. Restaud, more and more sullen, was silent.

Suddenly a shrill tune arose. They recognised the modulation of the little flute. It alternately wept and laughed on Jubault's lips. In his *blaque faubourienne*, he was beguiling distress and sarcasm. One would have said the feeble voice was the very breath of the army. Its revengeful complaint had something bitter about it which pierced the heart. Du Breuil, guided by the sound, said:

'Here is our house.'

A ray of light filtered through the stable windows. Losing breath, the little flute became harsh and laughing. Restaud, who was exasperated by it, shook the door with a kick. There was nothing but darkness and silence.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER crossing the Moyon-Pont Du Breuil struck off to the right. The meeting was at nine o'clock at the barracks of the Engineers. The nearest way was to follow the Rue de la Garde, and to skirt the Esplanade.

Although the meeting on the previous day had appeared to him to augur badly, he clung to the hope of a sortie *en masse* with an ardour all the more desperate as he felt the branch cracking beneath him. Restaud's words had haunted him the whole night. If the mirage of a supreme sortie, headed by a responsible, qualified chief, vanished—and Du Breuil would only think with infinite perplexity of the case of conscience of an individual flight. Then, what there slumbered within him of adventure and passion arose with violence, but the feeling of discipline and this new idea of solidarity immediately bound him in every limb; they were chains revealed by their tension.

In the rain and the wind, more furious every day, the leafless quincunx, in rows, of the Esplanade, swayed their skeleton branches. He passed near large conical tents made into ambulances. Twenty wounded men shivered under each of them. Through the stiffened canvas, hermetically closed, he heard broken words, groans, and death-rattles. He imagined that pain-stricken flesh rolling on its camp-beds, the wretched, torn blankets, the water filtering through a thousand holes, the ground turned into a lake, the heavy, moist atmosphere. He hurried on. The immense sigh from the suffering camp pursued him like a murmur of appeal. A little further on, on the Place Royale, long piles of waggons formed avenues of hospitals, continually crossed by the raised cassock of a priest, the turned-down hood of a doctor. Every step was the hurried coming and going of infirmiry attendants under their streaming umbrellas. Certain waggons were overflowing with wounded. Death had thinned others. Through the chinks of doors he saw stretched out forms, pale faces, pale linen, all the horror of sanies and black blood. And from these motionless waggons, in which so many unfortunates, soldiers like himself, were completing their human journey, an immense sigh also rose. He thought he could hear the lament of dear voices—Lacoste, Restaud, Védel. . . . Through the complaint of the wounded passed the far-off hum of the army, and cries rose in himself, hereditary echoes of a line of soldiers. That feeble sigh! It was his father who uttered it, his arm shattered in the abandon of a Kabyle battle-field; that harsh complaint escaped, under the sword of Blücher's horsemen, from the lips of his grandfather, a Lieutenant of the last square at Waterloo; that death-rattle was the agony of his great-uncle, commander of a demi-brigade at Valmy. His heart replied to the murmur of appeal. Someone called to him. Carrouge!

‘Useless to push on as far as the barracks, my dear fellow. I have come from there. You’ll only find Rossel seated at a table with two white paper books before him. They come in and out. Curious for information, Adjutant-Majors sent by their Colonels to ask for explanations. . . . He notes down the effectives, the positions and the movement. . . . A pupil of the Polytechnic at the same time makes registry on a large map of the intrenched camp. Five thousand six hundred men are inscribed. Clinchant will be there at one o’clock. His Aide-de-camp has promised it. That is making progress!’

He appeared to be very pleased. His complexion, of a dry pimenta, shone with hope. He vigorously rubbed his hands together.

‘We did good business this morning. The colours——’

‘Well?’ said Du Breuil with a start, seized by the horrible suspicion.

Carrouge made an energetic gesture.

‘Burnt, destroyed! . . . Not a colour of the Guard is left. The Grenadiers and the Zouaves commenced by destroying theirs yesterday spontaneously. And when the Marshal’s orders came, do you know what Jeanningros replied? “The colours have been torn up by my orders; the staffs and the eagles have been sawn up. The colours of my brigade shall not go to Berlin.” Isn’t that speaking out? All the others were taken at break of day to the Arsenal by Melchior, the chief of the artillery staff. I saw the waggon and the escort pass—a Lieutenant and four non-commissioned officers on horseback. I followed. It was hardly light. We entered with the first workmen. They lit the forge furnace, and before the workmen and a few Chasseurs and Voltigeurs who happened to be there the flags were unfurled. Melchior cut off the numbers of the regiments, and then a white-haired Adjutant, a veteran, burnt the silk, sawed the staffs to pieces, hammered and cut the eagles. You should have seen his hands trembling. Not one is left, I swear to you,’ he said, wiping away a tear. ‘Then I left, sick at heart.’

Du Breuil clasped Carrouge’s arm.

‘And the others,’ he murmured—‘the other colours? Are they burning them?’

‘Ma foi!’ said Carrouge, ‘I suppose so. . . . We arrived the first. When I was leaving the forge I saw Colonel de Girels. The old Adjutant had also destroyed a few cavalry standards which had been deposited at the Arsenal, it appears,

for some time. He was in the act of breaking the last eagle, and said to the Colonel: "Here's one at least which the Prussians shall not have!" De Girels seemed pleased.'

Du Breuil retained a feeling of disquietude. He told Carrouge of Captain de Verdier's confidence, the order to preserve the colours and make an inventory of them.

'We must be distrustful of everything,' said Carrouge. 'Let's go to the Arsenal.'

They followed the Rue Serpenoise, the Rue du Plat-d'Étain, and the Rue Taison. Everywhere, in the rain, were anxious groups and sad faces. On the thresholds of the doors old women were on the look-out for news. Hanging from a window was the faded shred of a tricolour flag—a sorry remnant of the decorations. Certain shops, full of unsaleable objects, were half closed, their shutters were up; on the other hand, grocers', pork-butchers', confectioners', and fruiterers' shops were completely devastated, only showing bare walls and empty shelves. The blockade had left its mark even in the relations of life. Only needs which were necessities were satisfied, and what was ruin to one part of commerce enriched the other part.

At the corner of the Protestant Church they met Barrus, who was very excited. He had come from the Arsenal.

'Do you know what is happening?' he said. 'They are polishing, cleaning, and repairing. Instead of surrendering to the enemy a dismantled fort and useless material, they are putting everything in order, counting everything down to the last nail. A civil engineer has just been summoned to put a large bore cannon, which was damaged by a Prussian bullet, in order. To think that two days ago we were still mounting cannon on the ramparts. . . .'

'The capitulation is signed. Everything will be surrendered at noon to-morrow,' said Du Breuil.

Barrus became extremely red. Ideas flocked upon him with such violence that words, strangled, would not flow. Suddenly they burst forth in a stream:

'To leave the fortifications of the town and the intrenched camp intact is a crime. Science gives us all the means of destruction. By ruining the forts, the sluices, the fortifications, and the military buildings, we shall deprive the enemy of an almost impregnable *point d'appui*. They would find neither buildings for their garrisons nor magazines for their supplies. The town would have a few windows broken by the explosion,

but it would gain by expanding, and by breathing freely outside the stone corset which stifles it. But go find patriotism and energy among all these Generals, ready for killing, who have been fattened by the Empire, who regret only one thing, their flesh-pots, and who sigh after their beds!

Carrouge shrugged his shoulders. Barrus' exaltation increased.

'Yes, the Empire is the cause of everything. Rotten head and dead arms! All this is just. France must atone!' A dark flame shone in his eyes. Hard wrinkles barred his sectarian forehead. 'But the Republic is going to sweep away this filth. She carries in her pure hands justice and liberty.' He gave a sneer of rage. 'Ah, ah! we have fortified Metz for the past two months. . . . We have toiled and perspired well. . . .' His voice suddenly became calm. 'There is other work to be done. I've had enough of working for the King of Prussia.'

He left gesticulating.

'Queer chap!' growled Carrouge. 'As if politics had anything to do with the matter!'

A convinced Imperialist, he retained within himself the belief in the past; the faults of the Empire remained hidden from him. On the previous day he still admitted that, faithful to its oath, the army, leaving Metz with arms and baggage, was going to contribute to a restoration; but, reduced to the abrupt horror of capitulation, he had now but one thought—to make a sortie, at all cost.

They reached the gardens which at the left border the extremity of the Rue des Carmes. The Arsenal rose before them with its double zone of walls and water. As they were going to cross a narrow, small bridge, after passing through the first door, they saw some infantry officers who were coming towards them, speaking in a high tone of voice and greatly excited. Du Breuil recognised Védél's fine, downcast face among the group.

'Is that you, Pierre?' cried the Captain, feverishly taking hold of his hands. 'A terrible thing has happened to me!'

He showed the copy of an order. He unfolded the paper with his clumsy fingers. Du Breuil read it at a glance. It was Bazaine's last orders relative to the colours. He imagined he could hear Massoli's expressionless voice muttering: '. . . and taken to the Metz Arsenal. You will inform the chief of the corps that they will be burnt there. . . .'

‘Well?’ he asked.

‘Well,’ said Védél, ‘the waggon came into the camp at nightfall yesterday to take away the flag as though it were a shameful corpse. The idea that it would be burnt with the others consoled us a little. But this morning, when the troopers looked for “their village steeple,” there was such excitement that the Colonel at once sent me off to the Arsenal to ascertain the incineration *de visu*. But . . . upon arriving—’

His voice was broken with anguish. Du Breuil then saw that his cousin’s eyes were red and swollen. He was deeply moved at this grief; he pressed the big moist hands in his own. Ah! the suspicions of the previous day!

‘Upon arriving . . . the director of the Arsenal to whom I showed my order said to me: “It is impossible. This is what I received one hour ago.” And he made me read a letter from General Soleille ordering him to preserve the eagles. “They must form part of the inventory drawn up by a commission of French and Prussian officers. . . .” Then, suddenly, surprise and the idea of losing my flag in this way made me burst into tears. Colonel de Girels, seeing this, was as moved as myself. “Take back your flag,” he said to me, “in exchange for the receipt, and do what you like with it. . . .” But, you understand, what is to be done? I don’t know. I haven’t an order. Then . . . then . . . I set off again. Ah! my poor Pierre, I am very unfortunate.’

Two large tears rolled down his sunburnt cheeks. He looked at Du Breuil with all his distressed affection, as though he was asking for counsel, support. But, guessing that his powerlessness was equal to his own, he went away with an unsettled air.

Carrouge, after a moment’s pause, burst out:

‘Damn it, you’re right! Ours have had a narrow escape!’

‘Yes,’ murmured Du Breuil; ‘that’s plain.’

They now met other waggons. The funereal convoys succeeded each other, with their escorts of muddy non-commissioned officers and lean ‘screws.’ Du Breuil and Carrouge, under the gray sky and in the fine rain, shivered with anger and shame as they passed. They skirted also long files of men who had been soldiers. Some were going to give up their arms; others, who had abandoned them already, silently walked along with hands hung down. All appeared to be dismayed at the act which they were made to commit. At the Pont de Grilles, Carrouge, who had some business to see to at the Chambièrre barracks, moved away.

Du Breuil thought of the colours. The trick was played ! The day before yesterday, the 26th, after the council, public order to Soleille to collect and burn them ; Soleille, as was right, did not hesitate. Yesterday, the 27th, after the report, fresh orders. First, the commanders of the corps will send their eagles to the Arsenal ; second, the director will preserve them until the inventory is made out. But, as the last order would dismay the army, the first part alone is sent. The emotion, however, gradually increases. Then, in order to calm it, the last orders to the commanders of the corps—that the eagles be collected and burnt. But they omit to inform Soleille, and take care to inform the Arsenal, through Cofinières, to limit itself to the receipt of the colours pure and simple. Besides, the colours must only be taken the next morning, at the hour at which Colonel de Girels will have received the order to preserve them, and place them in the inventory, at the hour at which the capitulation will be signed, and thus, out of respect for a given promise, making all destruction impossible. Finally, in case a few fanatics succeed in saving their flags, Bazaine is excused with the conqueror beforehand.

The waters of the Moselle, swollen by recent storms, flowed in a muddy torrent. Du Breuil watched for a moment the little tumultuous waves. Sometimes they spread out into heavy sheets of water, then hollowed out in eddies. He called to mind the day upon which, bending over the green water, he had watched it fleeing towards Thionville, reaching free countries. . . . 'Where was it going ?' he thought then. 'How would this finish ? Would they ever leave this diabolical Metz ?' He saw himself even then suffering in his friendship for D'Avol, in his love for Anine. He saw himself again drawing the opal ring from his finger. It sparkled in the dying day like a reflection of beauty, youth, and pleasure. And the sweet face of Mme. de Guëonic reappeared. . . . Then the cracked jewel fell into the dark water. . . . Whither had the current taken it ? . . . He felt himself to be also a dead thing, drifting, lost !

One hour afterwards he found Judin again, at the Hôtel du Nord. What was the good of returning to head-quarters when there was nothing to do, as he was not on duty ? He had better wait in Metz for he knew not what—the unknown of events, the possibility of a sortie. . . .

They did not exchange twenty words at table. As they

were rising Du Breuil, with hurried words, opened his heart. He spoke of all the ignominies of the last few days, and, to crown all, the infamous comedy of the flags. The evening of Rezonville rose in his memory. He recollected the cold night, the bivouac lighted by a large fire, the flag lying upon its bed of arms. The earth around was strewn with corpses. Their souls reposed in its folds. To-morrow with the dawn it would shake its glorious tatter of silk; from the shroud with golden letters would spring towards the sun the flock of past victories. And now these emblems of the Fatherland were arranged in rows against an office wall, waiting in their black cases until a Prussian commissary, armed with a notebook, came to take them at the point of the pencil.

Judin raised his head.

‘I know some which will escape,’ he said. ‘By chance this morning I passed the house which Laveaucoupet occupies. Four waggons, containing the eagles of the garrison scattered in the forts, were standing before the door. The General, they said in a crowd, refused to send his flags to the Arsenal, “as an old horse is sent to the knacker’s!” They were going to burn them in the courtyard of the house in the presence of the staff and the escorts. . . . But almost immediately the waggons went back along the roads to the forts, and the order given by the General spread among the groups: “Take the flags from the hearse, in which they are enclosed, before the regiments! Let the last honours be rendered them, and then let them be burnt!”’

At these words a tall officer, with a long nose and long moustache, who entered the dining-room with a portfolio under his arm, passed them.

‘Is that you, Laisné?’ exclaimed Du Breuil.

‘Yes, returned from the Ban Saint-Martin. You were speaking of the colours, eh?’ And in a proud tone, as though the heroism of one rebounded upon all, he said: ‘The 2nd corps has done its duty! Read this.’

He proudly held out a letter written by Lapasset to General Frossard. Du Breuil read:

‘GENERAL,

‘The mixed brigade gives up its colours to nobody, and the sad mission of burning them rests with nobody. It has itself carried out this mission this morning, and I have the official report of this lugubrious operation in my possession.’

When Laisné had gone, Du Breuil said to Judin :

‘That is splendid! . . . Such are the chiefs we ought to have had!’

They found a great stir in the courtyard, and in the office at the Engineers’ barracks. More than three hundred officers had assembled. Extreme excitement reigned. It was a continued hum of voices, traversed by shouts and cries. ‘Time presses! Where is General Clinchant? Our mitrailleuses are at the Arsenal! They are disarming the 4th corps! They are taking the last guns to the magazines!’

The most excited struggled and floundered among the groups.

‘They told us there was a General? Where is he? Let him come forward!’

And in the midst of the growing tumult there were still the disputes and recriminations, the puerile disturbance of the previous day. Complaints without an object, threats of death sprang from all mouths. Some gave vent to their ambitious intrigues. This spectacle sickened Du Breuil. There was a movement of keen curiosity. Colonel Boissonnet was withdrawing.

‘Hullo, Charlys!’ cried Judin.

Behind the Colonel appeared D’Avol, Carrouge, De Serres, and Thomas, who retained him.

‘No, D’Avol! I shall go also,’ Charlys was saying. He saw Du Breuil, and made a sign to him. ‘And you, friend? Are you going to remain? There is nothing to be done here. I renounce.’

D’Avol cast upon them a scornful look, and in a hard voice which was meant for Du Breuil, although he had pretended not to see him, he said :

‘Rest easy, Colonel. You won’t be the only one.’

‘I only admit of a sortie in a body,’ continued Charlys. Sadness passed over his bony face. ‘Lacking a leader, I see that it is impossible. All other attempts are seditious. I have no right to give orders. I withdraw.’

‘Joy to you!’ cried D’Avol. Charlys was already some distance away. ‘I shall get out of this trap, cost what it may! For one must have a solid stomach,’ he added, turning towards Du Breuil with eyes full of disdain and hatred, ‘to remain here.’

‘What do you say?’ exclaimed Du Breuil dryly, advancing a step.

‘I say,’ continued D’Avol in a cutting tone, ‘that to recog-

nise capitulation is to confess one's self responsible with Bazaine. Let him participate who wishes his infamy. I don't eat of that bread !'

There was a short silence. Judin with his uninjured hand sought that of Du Breuil, who, white with rage, was looking at D'Avol with compressed lips.

D'Avol continued :

'Let all brave men imitate me, and to-morrow, on French territory, the army will be able to say : "Nothing is lost, honour is saved !"'

'Leave me, Maxime,' said Du Breuil with the calm of a man who has just come to a definite decision. Turning towards D'Avol he said :

'It is because the army is made up of brave men that it will not imitate you ! Have no care for its honour ; it is above your judgment ! But you are free to take to flight, and to-morrow, on French territory, you will be able to say : "All is lost, pride is saved !"'

'The treason of a chief releases the soldier,' exclaimed D'Avol, shrugging his shoulders. 'Leaders are only to fight.'

'It remains for comrades to suffer.'

'Mere words ! The ship is sinking. Everybody for himself.'

'That is the excuse of the coward who deserts !'

D'Avol started under the insult.

'Which of the two is a coward—he who risks his life or he who——'

'Does his duty,' cut in Du Breuil.

'Ah ! ah !' jeered D'Avol with insulting raillery. . . . 'His duty ! . . . Do you know what your duty is ?'

'Yes,' said Du Breuil, who was with difficulty controlling himself. 'Duty in such misfortune is to do that which costs the most.'

D'Avol smiled outrageously.

'Really ? Prudence requires an effort ? I should have bet on bravery. . . .'

'You lie !' cried Du Breuil.

The word cracked like a box on the ears. D'Avol saw red and rushed forward. But Judin, Carrouge, and others interposed. Captain de Serres and Lieutenant Thomas dragged away their Major, who, furious, turned his head at each step, still uttering insults.

The emotion caused by this short scene was lost in the general tumult. Excitement was at its height. Some pro-

posed to burn the Arsenal and to get back the flags, others to shoot Bazaine. The Captain of Carabineers cried, in a paroxysm of rage :

‘The rappel! The tocsin! To arms! to arms! . . .’

Carrouge and Major Leperche made a suggestion that the ‘most resolute meet at nine o’clock at night on the Sarrebrück road to try to make a sortie.’

‘Let’s go,’ said Du Breuil to Judin.

He experienced a feeling of disgust, an inexpressible bitterness. He had hastened to leave this place of sterile agitation. The words uttered by D’Avol pierced him like so many wounds; those which he had not pronounced envenomed them the more. The thought of Anine rose up between them like a forest of swords. They were separated by icy steppes, burning deserts, a whole world. To think that two months ago they were two friends, two brothers! Why, how had they come to this? Du Breuil did not succeed in explaining it. The open wound bled the more. In his sorrow he felt a bitter voluptuousness, a frenzy of aversion so keen that it became intoxicating. His hatred was possessed of the violence of love.

Their attention was attracted in the street by an unusual tumult. Workmen, citizens, and women were running in the direction of the Place d’Armes, whence confused noises arose. Men seized old rifles, swords, and pikes. When crossing the Place Saint-Louis they saw some madmen tearing up Coffinières’ last proclamation with cries of ‘Death!’

‘Have you read it?’ asked Judin.

Upon receiving a sign in the negative, he quoted some of its essential features :

“Metz succumbs with honour! . . . Never in military history had a fortified town held out until so complete an exhaustion of its resources. . . . Four or five days of resistance would, besides, only result in an aggravation of the inhabitants’ situation, etc.” Yes, dust in one’s eyes!’ continued Judin. ‘The only powder these gentlemen use. I blushed with shame yesterday upon reading it, for the markets are overflowing: there are thousands of horses to eat, wine, coffee, brandy, powder, shells, cartridges; a hundred thousand men ready to die, and they dare to do this! . . .’

Two men passed them.

‘Is that you!’ cried Du Breuil, recognising Bersheim and old Krudger.

'Yes,' said Bersheim; 'we are going to the Engineers' barracks. It appears there are a few brave men there resolved for anything.'

Du Breuil shook his head sadly.

'Resolved for nothing! All is over.'

Judin questioned Krudger. The mob was in a state of agitation on the Place d'Armes. A crowd of citizens had invaded the Divisionary Hôtel, heaping reproaches and insults upon Coffinières. And the old Lorraine man always returned to the same subject: Metz protected by her forts, her ramparts bristling with cannon; Metz defended by her garrison of twenty-nine thousand men and its manly population; Metz impregnable and a virgin was going to open her gates, capitulate without a breach and without assault! . . .

'And this,' he concluded, casting a look of hatred towards Du Breuil, 'in view of the powerless eyes of the bravest army, the cause and the witness of our shame!'

'Provisions are lacking,' affirmed Bersheim categorically.

Judin and Krudger cried that they could hold out for several days yet. The Metz citizen, whose white beard trembled, ironically apostrophized Du Breuil:

'Are not the military regulations formal, Major? "On the surrender of a fort, advanced or retarded by a single day, may depend the salvation of the country? . . ."'

He trembled with exasperation. Du Breuil sympathized with him in a look. As they advanced, he read stupor depicted upon people's faces. Tradesmen were talking before their half-open shops. Women formed groups, talking in low tones; some were weeping.

'I tell you, Krudger,' said Bersheim, 'that provisions are lacking. We are eating the last morsel of bread. My friend Bouchotte, who mills for the whole town, told me yesterday that his bushels were empty. He could only find three sacks of wheat for sale—one of the 1851 harvest, and the two others of that of 1852! And you won't suspect Bouchotte after his fine action of to-day. He has just refused the Cross,' he added to Du Breuil. 'Yes, never would he have seen the ink upon his brevet without sorrow—the ink which was used, perhaps, to draw up the capitulation. Those were his very words.'

'And I assure you,' said Krudger, 'that there are resources in hiding!'

The discussion was becoming bitter. They bitterly reproached each other for their difference of opinion. They

exhausted themselves in trying to find an outlet. The projects of the one seemed absurd to the other.

‘The Municipal Council,’ said Bersheim, ‘has allowed itself to be flouted like a child.’

Krudger became violently angry at these words, which concerned his son. So the two Metz citizens wasted their strength in fruitless rage and sterile desolation.

The growing uproar mingled into a single shout. They reached the Place d’Armes, which was covered with people, a mass of gesticulating groups and furious men running in bodies. Some rushed towards the Rue de la Prinerie, where Coffinières resided; others waved flags. The length of the cathedral some National Guards succeeded in disarming a company which was carrying its rifles to the Arsenal. The soldiers quietly made no resistance. Some fanatics were brandishing chassepots and distributing cartridges, which had been stolen from the military stations. Here and there shots were fired. Du Breuil recognised in the midst of a group the editor of a Metz newspaper, who, astride a large horse, was vociferating the ‘Marseillaise,’ at the same time firing his pistol in the air. A tall, beautiful woman, dressed like a Goddess of Liberty, was holding the horse’s bridle. Suddenly the eternal Captain of Carabineers, bare-breasted, haggard, arose before them.

‘Forward, friends!’ he howled. ‘Follow me! I stake my head, but I don’t care a damn!’

A formidable pushing near the cathedral made a diversion. The doors gave way, and the crowd invaded the towers. A handful of strong men hung themselves on to the Mutte, and over the Place d’Armes in delirium, over Metz and over the army, the enormous bell of days of mourning sent out, even to the enemy’s camps, its funereal groans, in reply to which there came from church to church the sobbing appeal of tocsins.

‘Georges!’ cried M. Krudger.

He had just caught sight of his son. The long-bodied municipal councillor, with a rough, open face, was haranguing the crowd.

‘Ah, father!’ he uttered, pointing out the invaded divisionary residence, ‘if you had heard Coffinières stammering in the midst of all these brave men mad with rage and sorrow! He replied with vague words, called for respect due to his duties. How he must now regret the false position he has been in, suffer in his soldier’s heart for having seen clearly too late!’

Cheers and cries interrupted his speech. A National Guard, the tricolour flag in his hand, was proclaiming the Republic before Fabert's statue, draped in crape. Above the tumult of the town the Mutte sent forth its lamentations. Ringing a full peal, the Lorraine bell exhaled its fury mingled with complaints. It was the very voice of the ancient city. In the vibrations of the bronze passed the harsh cries of inviolate Metz, the malediction of mothers, the death-rattle of wounded men, and the sigh of the dead. Du Breuil fled, pursued by the terrible resonance, the obsession of this knell, which tormented his heart.

CHAPTER IV.

AT the Ban Saint-Martin everything spoke of the final agony. The impedimenta of the headquarters staff lay piled in the mud. Long files of artillery, and commissariat waggons and vehicles belonging to other sections, invaded the old parade ground. One saw nothing but teams wandering aimlessly, or dying where they stood—a jumble of trappings and dirt. The offices of the general staff were almost empty. Around Laune, a few faithful officers—Fay, Samuel, Restaud, and Décherac—attended to their last duties. It was necessary to make a little order in the unspeakable confusion. Officer by officer, the chief headquarters staff had, since the previous day, dissolved and become disintegrated. Just as Du Breuil was going to open the door, the clatter of hoofs resounded. Floppe dismounted.

‘Well, Floppe, what news?’

A grin passed over his rugged face. There was nothing good to speak of. They were surrendering their arms, carefully cleaned, so that the Prussians should be able to use them as soon as possible. Rumours were circulating in the camps with the object of allaying the soldiers' wrath: they were to be allowed to return home; only the officers would be made prisoners. Or else: the enemy would treat our forces with rigour if the arms were not surrendered in good condition. Or, again: that after their captivity, which was to be short, the regiments would return to Metz, and be given back their rifles and guns. . . . Floppe added:

‘I met a good many troops on my way to Moulins, where I went with the officer in charge of the parleying party.’

Du Breuil looked at him questioningly.

‘Why, don’t you know?’ said Floppe. ‘We had a bad fright while you were away. At noon came an insolent letter from Stiehle to Jarras, declaring that he could have no faith in the assurances of the previous day. It was such a habit to destroy insignia at each revolution! Consequently, he demanded to know the exact number of the eagles, threatening in so many words to consider the treaty null and void in case there was a deficiency. You ought to have seen the panic! They ran for Soleille, and drew up a nice letter, promising to be good, and to deliver all the forty-one remaining colours. Then Soleille trotted off to the Arsenal to count them again, and Girels was admonished not to let one escape.’

Du Breuil moved to enter without answering.

‘Just listen!’ said Floppe. ‘Here’s the finest bit. When Nugues saw Jarras this morning, he reported to him about yesterday’s orders—that great joke, you know, about burning . . . The chief, vastly worried because of his signature and its attendant responsibility, posted off at once to the Marshal, and, with the help of Stiehle’s letter, came back with a fresh order. Galling enough it was, too! Restaud, who carried it out while I was there, found the pill bitter.’

‘Restaud?’ exclaimed Du Breuil.

And Floppe nodded, adding:

‘Poor chap! What a look!’

They entered together. Eight or ten officers were writing, grouped in a corner of the room. Restaud remained aloof, brooding, with the look of a wounded animal. The hand he stretched out in response to Du Breuil’s greeting drew back.

Floppe turned towards Du Breuil.

‘Fancy, Jarras made him tear out of the order-book the page on which the order to burn the colours was entered! It happened to be in the middle of a page, so he took the sheet out, and a secretary copied on to the next page what writing there remained. . . . That’s how the trick was done! Clean record, you see, in case our books fall into the hands of Frederick Charles!’

Restaud looked up at Du Breuil with an expression of the deepest distress. What he must have suffered in destroying the page! what horrible torture for this conscientious man, this pure, unswerving heart! Du Breuil was shaken with the pity of it. Poor fellow! . . . Revolting with all his soul against such fraud, his native honesty rising up against it, yet simply

obeying without a word. He could picture the shivering movement of the hand. Assuredly, Restaud must have found upon that occasion his bitterest trial, felt the horrors of the worst torture. His face spoke of it. Unseen tears had left their deep marks.

The door opened, and Charlys entered. Fatigue bent his slender shoulders and long legs. His prominent cheekbones burned with fever.

‘Still at work?’ was his remark to Laune.

He sat down.

‘The Generals bade farewell to their officers. It was not all smooth sailing, so they say. . . . Regular chorus of rebukes and reproaches.’

He shook his head and looked at Laune. ‘I thought that Jarras had put the key under the door?’

‘The archives are in safety,’ replied Laune. ‘The General had them taken yesterday to Saint Clément’s school.’

‘Ah, yes!’ jeered Charlys; ‘his precious account books!’

Floppe smiled maliciously. The coolness between Charlys and Jarras, a counterpart of that between the chief of the general staff and Bazaine, was one of his stock subjects of mirth.

‘You will see,’ he said, ‘they alone are not going to lay down their arms.’

Charlys began a story. The name of Clinchant made everyone look up.

‘Lebœuf summoned him for a lecturing,’ Charlys narrated in his tired voice, ‘and Changarnier was there to receive him. Clinchant stuck to his guns, declaring himself in favour of attempting a sortie. But Changarnier snubbed him most unmercifully, and, at last, losing all patience, pushed him right up to the open door leading into the orderly-room. At the same time, he shouted, “I don’t like insubordination, do you hear, General? I would rather see the army perish than save itself at the cost of discipline!”’

All the officers had laid down their pens, listening attentively. Du Breuil saw a strange look pass over Restaud’s face at the last words. Charlys went on:

‘Exhausted by this effort, Changarnier thereupon threw himself into Clinchant’s arms; then fell helplessly on to a sofa, and, before all the Aides-de-camp, this old hero burst into tears. In his breast the citizen is as strong as the soldier.’

In the silence which followed no one noticed the entrance of

Major Mourgues. He handed Laune the minute of an order, and, without saying a word, made off. Having read the paper, Laune offered it to Charlys with an incisive gesture; then in a dry voice he said:

‘Now, gentlemen! A last effort!’

Du Breuil sat down beside the others, and with a sputtering pen, which he felt like crushing through the paper at the end of each line, he wrote, with throbbing temples and flushed brow, the general order in which Bazaine, comparing himself with Masséna, Kléber, and Gouvion Saint-Cyr, had the audacity to boast of having *gloriously accomplished his duty to the uttermost human limits*, and, to extort resignation from the troops, lied without end, promising them, as soon as peace had been signed, that Metz and their arms and baggage would be restored to them.

The silent reproof aroused by this tissue of hollow, slippery phrases, his fury and indignant resignation, were still in Du Breuil’s mind when he reached his cold room. Frisch had not been able to make up his mind to light a fire. Mme. Guimbail was doubtless asleep, her light being out. The remnant of a candle cast a sad light on the walls. On the other side of the partition he could hear Restaud moving now and then. Several times Du Breuil had called him, tapping gently at his door. In vain. Absorbed, no doubt, in his grief, Restaud obstinately kept silence. This idea of his friend avoiding him to suffer undisturbed heightened his wretchedness. It seemed as if this lonely evening, the last he would spend under that roof, was an epitome of all those preceding it, resuming and multiplying their sadness and their solitude to dizzy proportions. The blackened, rain-bespattered panes did not intercept the darkness. He surveyed the narrow room, the bare walls, the untidy table whereon the candle-end threw its fitful light upon the still open volume of Napoleon’s ‘*Mémoires*.’ Over the mantelpiece the inexorable calendar marked the day. Two black figures showed the date—October 28. He went closer and read the ephemerides: October 28, 1806, *Prise de Berlin!* The irony of history, like a whip-lash, cut him to the heart. Turning to the window he felt the loneliness of the empty house and the icy autumn night. The tocsin of the Mutte was sending forth its warning of riot and of burial, ringing, ringing, ringing. Like the shiver of immense draperies of woe every clang of the bronze vibrated with a groan in the darkness. The image of the sleeping city rose before him, coupled with

the dolorous slumbers of Anine. He longed to figure in her dreams. The bell persisted in its far-reaching summons. He was thinking now of the grandsons of those who took Berlin; of the disbanded army, a troop of phantoms. He saw once more the slough of the camping grounds, thousands of men snoring under the tents clad in tatters, lying in the rain and mud. Betwixt nightmares they were doubtless smiling at the thought of peaceful barrack-rooms in Germany, the promised shelter, the warm coverlet, and steaming rations! The behaviour of their chiefs gave them good excuse. . . . The clamour from the Mutte suddenly ceased.

It was broad daylight when Du Breuil awoke, unrested.

'Captain Restaud has already gone,' Frisch told him while stropping his razor and preparing the basin for his shave. 'He said he was going to the office to finish the work.'

Du Breuil unconsciously followed along the customary road. Everything seemed different. Houses and trees wore an unfamiliar, deserted look under the sombre sky. He looked towards Saint Quentin enveloped in mist, the clouds hanging low. . . . The imminence of departure estranged him from outside things.

In front of the Marshal's residence, the empty bivouac of the two escort troops made the square look vaster. Chasseurs and hussars had just rejoined their regiments. Only a company of Grenadiers of the Guard, who had been on permanent duty for a month past, remained lined up against the garden-walls, standing at ease. Orderlies were holding chargers harnessed for the march. Officers belonging to the Marshal's personal headquarters staff came and went, giving their last orders. Baggage-waggon were lined up, ready to start. As Du Breuil was going away, Major Mourgues caught sight of him, and running up, came to bid him adieu. His joy was ill-concealed. A brand-new ribbon, topped with a large rosette, glittered on his tunic. Du Breuil pretended not to see it, replying dryly:

'Bon voyage!'

Mourgues was not to be shaken off:

'You are looking at my cross? . . . I got the officer's ribbon only yesterday.'

'Oh!' was all Du Breuil's reply.

Mourgues went on:

'Yes. Why don't you ask for something? His Excellency will sign what you like!' (Du Breuil made a wry face.) 'You

are too particular ! It is right enough to accept a distinction when you have deserved it ! Bigger men than yourself have not turned up their noses. . . . ' (He smiled insinuatingly.) ' What do you suppose we are waiting for now ? . . . Nothing more,' he continued after a slight pause, ' than to give the Marshal time to finish distributing badges and commissions. He is besieged this morning !'

There was a commotion. Mourgues ran to his charger. The steps of the interior entrance were crowded with officers, personal friends, or self-seekers. The Marshal appeared. He walked heavily and, beneath a placid look, his face was bloated and worried. Du Breuil saw him mount. A file was detached from the company on duty, and marched ahead. Then, flanked by a double row of Grenadiers, Bazaine, followed by his general staff, silently passed out of the gate. The rest of the soldiers and the baggage-waggons moved off. Du Breuil saw them turn the corner of the street and disappear in the gloomy daylight.

At headquarters he found the faithful few of the preceding day around Laune and Fay. Restaud looked up. His eyes were calm, and his face austere, but peaceful. He seemed reconciled ; cheerful again in his serious fashion, almost sprightly. He was working with his usual ardour. His bearing made Du Breuil's spirits rise a little, sickened though he was at Bazaine's shameful departure. He had felt strangely before this Marshal of France hurrying towards the enemy's lines like an escaping criminal. Floppe, who had seen him pass, cried out :

' What a hurry he must be in to give himself up ! He sent word to Frederick Charles yesterday to know at what hour he could proceed to Corny ! And he has not waited for a reply.'

' No doubt,' exclaimed Décherac, ' he is afraid to face the sight of the army !'

' Ugh !' said Floppe, ' I am only surprised that he didn't leave sooner. Yesterday evening, when he asked for the password, which they had forgotten to send him, I thought he was going to scuttle at daybreak.'

Du Breuil wanted to know more. It seemed that the outposts had remained under arms to prevent any escape by night. Bazaine would want the password if he had wished to cross the lines at sunrise.

' That's true,' said Floppe. ' You were not here, then, yesterday, so you couldn't know ! . . . Imagine our surprise

when going over the list of passwords to find those selected for the 28th were: 'Dumouriez,' 'Dijon.' . . . Yes, Dumouriez! . . . So that the very moment our Commander-in-Chief deserts us, when the sentinel challenges him, Bazaine will have to reply by giving him the name of a traitor!

'The irony of fate!' said Du Breuil bitterly, and he thought of the calendar.

Changing the subject, Floppe growled:

'I have just met Lieutenant-Colonel Gex!'

Some exclamations of surprise were heard. Floppe continued pleasantly:

'Quite so. He is one of the deathbed promotions! . . . It's incredible what a batch there has been of them the last few days. The throng at the Marshal's never diminished. Those who had been his bitterest accusers rubbed shoulders with the worst time-servers in his ante-chamber. A score of ribbons gratuitously given for one that was deserved. Shoulder-knots, crosses, stars. . . . The regular blanks having been exhausted, Bazaine took to signing sheets of white paper. It seems that the Government official attached to his household for this work pointed out the irregularity of such procedure. Bazaine replied: "What does that matter if it pleases them? You know quite well that all these things will not be confirmed."'

There was an awkward silence. Du Breuil thought of Mourgues.

'Do you know,' resumed Décherac, 'what was one of the reasons why our ex-chiefs accepted the rigorous clauses of the treaty? I was yesterday in the Marshal's orderly-room, when a sterling fellow, one of the Guards' commissariat chiefs, and a friend of Bazaine, rushed in trembling with indignation, with a copy of the general order in his hand. "Where is the Marshal?" he cried. "His Excellency does not receive." "But you know me well; I am always admitted!" "The Marshal will see no one." Then, while he proceeded to vent his indignation, a voice rose in disclaimer: "We had, after all, to save our baggage."'

Décherac went on to tell of the failure of yesterday's sortie along the Sarrebrück road—the last attempt to pierce the enemy's lines. Scarcely sixty took part in it. Their plans were denounced by a report from General de Cisse, and only a few managed to escape. At the present moment the Guards as well as the troops at the outposts were giving up their chassepots. The Marshal had allowed them to keep their

rifles till now to assure the maintenance of order. Only yesterday three battalions of Voltigeurs had been sent into Metz to check rioting.

A gallop was heard outside. Captain Yung, who had that morning taken charge for the last time of the parleying service at Moulins-lès-Metz, was the arrival. He dismounted hurriedly, and entered the room, holding several letters.

‘Is General Jarras still here?’ he asked.

Laune pointed with his finger to the first-floor, where the chief of the general staff had shut himself up since the signing of the capitulation.

‘Oh! oh!’ ejaculated Floppe. ‘That means news.’

When Captain Yung came down all surrounded him. He told his story in hurried words:

‘I had been at Moulins about half an hour. The bugle signalled an approach. An officer of Prussian dragoons comes up and hands me a despatch in a large square envelope, and some letters for Jarras. “Please make haste, Captain,” he said. “Go as quickly as possible.” He even repeated, while I was mounting: “*Eilen Sie.*” I came back at a gallop. Abreast of Longueville I met the Marshal. He asked me if I had any letters. I handed him the large envelope. He seemed much taken aback and disheartened. He unfolded the despatch. It was in German. “Can you translate it?” he asked. And, remaining in my saddle, I read aloud. . . . Five paragraphs, signed by Stiehle. It began this way: “His Highness shares his satisfaction with you at the manner in which instructions have been carried out for surrendering the arms, material of war, and colours of the army of Metz. As regards your desire to be at headquarters before noon, in accordance with agreement, His Highness regrets his inability to accede to it, and hopes to be able to receive you this evening at five o’clock, or to-morrow morning at ten. He will send you further orders.”’

‘What a smack!’ said Floppe.

‘And it ended up,’ proceeded the Captain, ‘with directions for the residence of Prince Murat and of Jarras. As for Changarnier, he is free. . . . The Marshal was evidently much affected. “What is to be done?” he said to me. I advised him to wait at the outpost for fresh orders from Frederick Charles.’

Yung having left, Décherac and Floppe disappeared, one after the other.

Du Breuil came over to shake hands with Restaud.

'Are you coming?' he said. 'This place stifles me.'

In the silent office the faithful few gathered round Laune were making it a point of honour to complete their tasks, putting all in order.

'No,' said Restaud, 'not till mid-day. The chief headquarters staff will cease to exist at the same time as the army.'

They looked at each other fixedly. Du Breuil murmured, 'You are a plucky fellow, no mistake!' and went out.

Rain was streaming. It enveloped him in eddying torrents, while through the obliqueness of the downpour floated a whirling mist. Trees and houses became indistinct like a landscape in dreams, only stranger and more deserted. The Ban Saint-Martin stretched out in slimy expanse, strewn with a chaos of vehicles. There they were by the hundred, waggons of all sorts, smithies, ambulances, canteens, forage, and amongst them wandered the last remaining horses. This was only a small part of the material being abandoned. Du Breuil thought of all the squares and cross-roads where enormous masses of impedimenta were stacked.

He took the road. When approaching the Porte de France, he came across long bodies of men making their way through the mist. Nearer, he recognised the uniform of the Grenadiers of the Guard. They were marching nearly in line, still with their knapsacks, and almost in step. The veteran was too strong in them. Although orders were wanting, and discipline had been slackened, the soldiering instinct compelled them to march steadily with the old proud bearing. Out of *esprit de corps* and respect for themselves, they had carefully burnished their accoutrements that morning. Their gaiters and straps were pipeclayed, and their eagled buttons shone. All the range of expressions between irony and furious anger distorted their faces. Some looked tense and rigid, as if petrified by despair. It was heartrending to see such an end for troops full of the vigour of life, the flower of the army, thus allowed to wither aimlessly. . . . Du Breuil thought of the battalions at Saint-Privat, and their enforced inaction within a few steps of the firing line. What a crime to neglect using such men! And now they were going away, lost forces, into the final dissolution. He pictured the country laid waste, this simultaneous exodus, the sad tramp of the troops. They were even then falling in for the last time, and from every direction, under the

rain, in the mud, the stricken columns were dragging their weary way, like the dismembered sections of a gigantic serpent.

The Voltigeurs were now advancing, recognisable by the yellow-green of their facings and braid. They followed on the steps of the Grenadiers towards the city glacis, in the direction of the Nancy road. In several regiments, the officers of the week had been alone told off to accompany the troops to the place of surrender. But almost in every case, from the youngest Subaltern to the Colonel, everyone had felt himself in honour bound to escort his men. Among the Voltigeurs every officer was present, marching in order of battle, the Generals in the van. Rank was lost sight of. All hearts beat in unison. There were no longer chiefs and subordinates, only one vast household of sufferers, bound together by one common tie of grief. Du Breuil caught sight of Boisjol. He looked like a wolf with blood-stained muzzle. A splinter from a shell had cut into his upper lip. The old African fighter went by, carrying his head thrown back, his eyes glistening.

The infantry Chasseurs and Zouaves came next. The small jacket, baggy Arab trousers and chechia made one think of battlefields scorched by the African sun, of the far-off skies of Italy and the Crimea.

Saddest of all was the unwonted silence which hung over this army on the march. Braying bugle and beating drum, all were in the hands of the victor, and mourning was blacker for their muteness. Suddenly, as the last battalion defiled, the column came to a halt. Du Breuil was going to take this opportunity for crossing, when up lumbered one of the Chasseurs' canteens, drawn by two sorry 'screws.' It came along with difficulty, keeping the right side of the road. The Zouaves made way. Du Breuil looked pityingly at the miserable waggon, all shattered and encrusted with dirt, and its spectral team. All at once he shivered as if struck to the heart.

A hoarse voice, sounding old, sarcastic, and desperate, cried :
'We are sold !'

Oh, how true that cry was now ! It seemed to him that it burst from a thousand tongues, extending far on the lips of each Zouave. 'We are sold ! we are sold !' thought every man. In the empty vehicle which brushed past him, Du Breuil recognised Forbach's memorable parrot perched on a case of brandy. How had he drifted there ? Bristling with rage, the bird flapped its wings, and in a strident scream repeated :

‘We are sold!’

Du Breuil remembered the day when this strange prophet of evil had uttered his first warnings. It was while leaving Mdlle. Sorbet’s house, after a visit to Judin. Védél was with him. . . . How indignantly they had repudiated such a foul slander, such blasphemy! But now the ignoble brute was right. Du Breuil felt humiliated and irritable. He looked at the parrot hatefully. The bird, seeing itself noticed, blinked its eyes mockingly under their horny lids. He raised in turn each of his scaly, thick-jointed claws, sharpened his beak on the side of the case, then, with sudden earnestness, called out:

‘To Berlin! to Berlin!’

Laughter arose—laughter in which sobbed all the illusions of the past. Every man felt that this parody of human speech, solemn in its oddity, re-echoed his own accents. With cruel preciseness, the portrait developed out of the caricature. Some rowdies shouted in tones whose gaiety was painful:

‘Passengers for Berlin, please take your seats! Passengers for the Rhine, hurry up!’

Excited by the noise, the parrot began humming jumbled songs, snatches of tunes that tailed on ludicrously, ending in hoarse gurgles. Then he softened his voice, and asked, in mincing, old maid’s accents: ‘Have you had a good breakfast, Jacky?’ continuing without a break, in sonorous growls: ‘Shoulder-r-r ar-rms! Pr-resent ar-rms! Vive Bazaine! Rub-a-dub, dub, dub. . . .’

Murmuring arose, and groans. At the grotesque command, some of the bronzed Zouave faces became pale. . . . Their arms? They were far away! . . .

‘Silence, Bazaine!’ muttered an old corporal covered with medals. And the bird, intoxicated by its noise, only put on extra energy:

‘Shoulder-r ar-rms! . . . Pr-resent ar-rms!’

In vain the canteen driver tried to quiet it. The ironical voice continued without cessation:

‘R-rub-a-dub, r-rub-a-dub, dub! Shoulder-r ar-rms! . . . Pr-resent ar-rms!’

All together, the disarmed soldiers yelled furiously: ‘Make him shut up! Kill him! Stop, or I’ll strangle you!’

A veteran, in a hurry to carry out his threat, made a bound on to the vehicle. Instinctively the crazy bird jumped off,

landing on the horses, flapping his wings. A broken waggon sticking out of the ditch attracted him. The parrot alighted on it, and, realizing his danger, proceeded to sing all the more lustily, out of sheer bravado. His whole repertory burst out afresh, in confused remembrance. He trilled it like a string of ghastly beads, in which the voices of his different owners came out in ridiculous, pitiful juxtaposition. Despite the outstretched hands and rush of angry Zouaves, he warbled blindly on:

‘Have you seen the moon, my love? . . . Scr-ratch! scr-ratch! . . . I’ve got some baccy, but you shan’t get . . . You rascal! . . . ’Tention! Pr-resent! Fire! . . .’

The bemedalled corporal seized him by a claw. A cutting stroke of the beak made him leave hold. The clumsy bird was escaping. Seized again by a dozen hands, he jerked out in a feathery spasm, as his neck was being wrung, a final: ‘To Ber-rl——’ which expired in a quack.

The column resumed its march. Pursued by the vision of this dead thing, now a ruffle of green feathers mixed with mud, Du Breuil walked quickly across the road. He felt mortified, as if summary execution had been meted to a portion of himself, to some of the thoughts and longings they all shared, by the stifling of this voice of grotesque similarity.

Behind him artillerymen were now passing. At the thought of D’Avol, his hatred was aroused. He overcame an impulse to look back. Perhaps Jacques had managed to cut through, after all. A wave of envious dislike passed over him. He looked round. The gunners were in the distance, cavalry was going by. From afar he could recognise through the curtain of rain the swaggering gait of heavy carabineers and cuirassiers under their red cloaks. Then came what were once the white cloaks of the Empress’s Dragoons. Suddenly his eyes clouded. A sky-blue tunic among other white cloaks disclosed to him the Lancers of the Guard. The memory of Lacoste overpowered him. He hungrily watched the passage of these men, among whom his friend had lived. In that strapping fellow with the jacket, who had attracted his notice, he fancied he recognised old Saint-Paul, hobbling along. . . . Again he saw the old warrior galloping, lance in hand, to the rescue of his Captain, and scattering Legrand’s murderous dragoons! And Du Breuil recalled the vision of the Yron plateau, the whirlwind of yells and dust, and Lacoste cut to pieces by French sabres. His eyes filled with tears. The Chasseurs and Guides were still defiling.

He recovered himself, and went on his way. Just as he was nearing the Porte de France a cannon-shot burst from Fort Saint-Quentin. Mid-day ! Through the silence waves of sound, re-echoing back, shivered and died away. Du Breuil had been startled, accustomed for three days past to this oppressive silence, which had fallen from the stilled forts like a leaden sheet over the city and cantonments. Instinctively, he turned his gaze towards Saint-Quentin, and, despite the distance, he divined rather than saw the final manœuvre. A flag was being lowered, and another hoisted in its place. Metz lay under German colours. France had just lost an army of 173,000 men, including 3 Field-Mmarshals, 6,000 officers, 41 eagles, 1,407 cannon, and 300,000 rifles, in addition to vast material of war.

He crossed the outworks of the gate and traversed the old fortifications, the drawbridge over the moats filled with water, and the heavy ramparts. The city could only be entered by a narrow passage between the walls of two bastions. In a sentry-box he caught sight of the spiked helmet and rifle of a hostile sentinel. There was nothing for it but to choke down shame and pass before the fellow's insolent stare.

The Rue de Paris was empty. Not a soul on the Pont des Morts or the Moyen Pont. The Moselle rolled its torrent of yellowish water, over which the rain was knitting its threads. As he went along he felt the silence of the last few days weigh more heavily. Broken for an instant by the gun-fire, its broad sheet extended more oppressively. Shops all closed and windows shuttered. Here and there a woman in mourning walking fast.

Mechanically he followed the road to the Place d'Armes. A detachment of the 14th Infantry Regiment was occupying it. Between the two great stone trophies, Fabert, in his shroud of crape, rendered adherent by the rain, seemed to be in fixed contemplation of the sombre dress and low helmets of the Prussian advance guard. Du Breuil hastily drew back. He wandered long through the half-deserted streets, where only such inhabitants as were compelled, and a few women carrying tricolour ribbons on their black bodices, could be seen. The rain still fell. He had lost all count of time.

All at once came the sound of harsh music in the distance, coming in the direction of the Rue Serpenoise. German faces were already to be seen, a motley throng of Jews, officials, and doctors. Grating foreign accents broke on the

ears. Multiplied a hundredfold, he recognised the typical features of the Enemy—hard blue eyes, red complexion, and tawny beard. He was surprised to be rubbing shoulders peacefully with men whom yesterday he would have been obliged to kill. His powerlessness revived his hate. He paled with suffering at the thought of meeting Baron von Hacks, and reading in his eyes, as at the hand-to-hand fight of Rezonville, a look of mingled irony, of sardonic politeness. The noise of fanfares increased. Dishevelled wenches were rushing to meet the conquerors. He followed them. On the Place Royale, before the statue of Marshal Ney, he saw a Prussian regiment march past, colours flying, to the sound of fife and drum.

This strident noise was insufferable after the days of mortal silence. He wanted to rush away. Squadrons blocked the road. Just then a gigantic Cuirassier of the Guard came out of a house. It was Major Couchorte, in full uniform. He came forward, his arms crossed and head erect. His cheeks were suffused with blood. He glared fiercely around. At the sight of this man in the transports of heroic madness, the German ranks opened to let him pass, and their commander, affected by so much suffering, lowered his sword in salute.

Du Breuil made off through the Rue de l'Esplanade. He encountered more regiments. Trousers tucked into their boots, and their necks gripped in the stiff collar, the ponderous infantrymen walked in stiff, rhythmic cadence. They advanced in a mass, with one movement. With the heavy tread of their heels on the pavement, they seemed to be trampling on Metz. Bands began playing everywhere, making brazen announcement of victory to the four corners of the town. And Du Breuil, like a hunted animal, felt the deafening sound overpower him, struck to the depths of his soul by the triumphal tally-ho! of the fifes and drums.

CHAPTER V.

ON Sunday, the 30th, he awoke at the Bersheims', in a small room which was prolific in memories. It was here that D'Avol, wounded, had vented his rancour. It was in the same bed that D'Avol had lain. He opened the door; pale faces were slumbering restlessly on the couches in the large room which served as a hospital. Du Breuil's thoughts were

troubled and doleful. Rain blurred the window-panes. He dressed quickly, and went out on tiptoe through the room where the wounded lay. One of them turned in his sleep, another was moaning. Du Breuil came to the entrance hall. Lisbeth was sweeping, her eyes red and swollen. She insisted that he should take a cup of coffee. No, he would not.

‘Is there any news of Bersheim?’

‘No; master has not returned. Neither has Thibaut. If something should have happened to them! . . .’

‘And the little girl?’

‘She is delirious. Sang all night through. Her mother knows nothing, fortunately. She is so taken up with the baby.’

In saying this, Lisbeth smiled in spite of her grief.

‘Didn’t you hear anything, sir? The pains set in at two in the morning. At four o’clock she gave birth to a little boy, rather delicate, but lively enough, all the same. He has done nothing but cry. Mme. Sophia and Madame passed the night together. They are in a great state because master does not return.’

Du Breuil went out. In the yard were three stacks of Dreyse rifles. And from the outhouses came the hubbub of guttural breathing. He looked in: stretched on the straw in two bare chambers were soldiers of the Landwehr, packed closely, snoring. Stupefaction came over him at the sound. He trembled with shame at the brutal violation of it: Metz awaking a German city! And the Thibauts’ little girl was probably on her death-bed. Another child had just been born. Its mournful whinings had followed, only by a few hours, the turmoil of fife and drum. Nothing had changed. Death and life, joy and pain, continued on. And they were the same pavements, the same streets, the same rain. . . . Ownerless horses wandered about, driven from their stables overnight to make room for the horses of the conqueror. At the Porte de France two Prussian sentries mounted guard, smoking cigars. By the roadside lay a dead horse between the shafts of a small cart—a ghastly heap, torn in places. Bodies of horses were lying everywhere, producing evil smells. In the gutters was a jumble of thousands of arms, broken drums, and bundles of cartridges. The camp appeared to be one mass of refuse, offal, discarded effects, rotting canvas—a dung-heap, a charnel-house. Yellow leaves whirled beneath the lowering sky.

The Ban Saint-Martin was still encumbered with the same

vast quantity of stores, waiting to be delivered ; waggons piled in inextricable confusion ; horses fastened to them for the last twenty-four hours, all harnessed and saddled, dying of hunger. Those that had broken their halters were pattering about in the slime. Countrymen, horse-dealers, and soldiers foraged around, picking out all but the worst. A spectral gelding tumbled into a ditch full of water near Du Breuil, had not the strength to rise, and died. . . . At last, at last, this nightmare was going to end. Du Breuil reached Mme. Guimbail's little house. A yellowish light shone from Restaud's window. It was to see him that Du Breuil had come back, feeling desperate need of shaking the hand of a brave and loyal comrade. What a silence in the little house ! . . . The door had yielded to his touch. No one to show him in. He went upstairs, filled with evil forebodings. A ghostly figure rose before him : it was Mme. Guimbail, with pale and sorrowful visage, faltering in her black dress as though she would faint. She pointed to Restaud's room without speaking. The door was open. Two candles burned in the sickly daylight. Restaud lay stretched on his bed, his tunic open, and shirt all blood-stained, revealing a reddish hole on the left breast. They had removed the regulation revolver from his tightened clasp. Restaud had shot himself with a bullet through the heart. He left a letter on the table. And Du Breuil, with clouded eyes, stiffening himself in agony not to burst into sobs, read the final farewell, biting his lips till they bled :

‘ MY DEAR DU BREUIL,

‘ Up to the last minute I did what I thought was my duty : I remained at my post. As a soldier I submitted to, and endured, that which I could not prevent. I set an example of discipline and resignation. I thought God would give me strength to go to the end. I made a mistake ; I could not bear so much shame. I prefer to die. I hope, dear friend, that you will be stronger than I, for my principles, my whole life, condemn my weakness, and I die in despair. . . . ’

He could not read further. Restaud spoke of his mother and sisters, confiding to him the task of telling them some day what were his last thoughts and dying remembrance. Unhappy man ! These dear ones had not kept him back. . . . He had lain down on his Calvary, crushed by his cross. The sacrifice had been beyond his strength. And Du Breuil

thought with hatred of the impious chief who would have to answer for all this suffering, all these dead! He cursed him from the bottom of his heart, the senseless scoundrel, murderer of his army and murderer of France! He listened with throbbing temples to the stories of Frisch and of Mme. Guimbail. The orderly, good fellow, was quite broken up.

'It was yesterday evening, sir, that I told him the Prussians were entering Longueville, occupying the houses. He said to me, "All right!" and shut himself up till nine o'clock in the evening.'

'I knocked several times,' went on Mme. Guimbail. 'It made me anxious that he did not wish to have dinner. All at once Jubault rushes upstairs, crying: "The Prussians are coming here!" . . . Five seconds—yes, five seconds more, and I hear an explosion. Frisch and Jubault got quite pale. I leant against the wall to save myself from falling. We all had a presentiment of what had happened. . . .'

And then the rest: the door burst open, no doctor to be found, no one at the general staff, and the dead-watchers softly coming and going through the silent hours of the night. Du Breuil could listen no longer. The mention of presentiment pursued his mind, besetting him with vague remorse. 'Restaud is asleep,' he had thought the other night, after knocking vainly at the partition wall. He could now picture his dreadful insomnia, the staring eyes, and chin resting on his clenched hands. . . . What torture the idea of suicide must have meant! Boldly faced, confronted with reason, dispersed, yet ever returning, till it had driven its poisoned shaft deep into the brain of this man who was so brave, so loyal, so pure. . . . Yet supposing Du Breuil had insisted! If he had forced the privacy of this chamber, had compelled Restaud to open, to speak, to argue! . . . Who knows if he might not have saved him from death? He remembered Restaud fiercely tearing out the page of the register, submissively rendering himself an accomplice in what was very much like a criminal act. That was what had finished him. Then Changarnier's words, repeated by Charlys! . . .

'Let the army perish rather than save itself at the loss of discipline.'

They had pushed Restaud's hesitating soul into the abyss. They had pronounced the verdict, and written the fatal decree in his blood.

Du Breuil performed the last sad rites. His hands were

trembling. With Frisch's help, he laid the body out, clothing Restaud in full uniform. He kept a medal which his friend wore, and cut a lock of his hair. Then he kissed the pale forehead, and went away to arrange for the funeral. Would he find a priest to bury the suicide? Formalities and declarations were necessary, for even at this hour the conqueror was laying his heavy hand everywhere. Du Breuil was saddened to think of how little account was this death. So many other preoccupations abounded. There was the herding of innumerable starving prisoners, the garrisoning and revictualling of Metz, the influx of strangers with their harsh, guttural tongue, and, behind the armed throng, all that followed in its wake: officials, barterers, Jews—an avalanche in which Du Breuil was tossed about unceasingly. By good fortune, he met a rugged, jovial face—the Abbé Trudaine, who, with cassock lifted over his ankles, was vainly seeking a conveyance to take him to Ars. He consented to help Du Breuil out of his difficulty, making a sad gesture, and murmuring: 'Poor fellow! God will have mercy on him. He must have suffered so much!' Then, kindly and simply:

'You may count on me, Major. I will say mass for your friend. He shall have Christian burial, I'll answer for it. In such an hour as this, we can only have humble thoughts.' But suddenly his eyes flamed out, and he waved his knotty stick. 'There is only one man here who deserves no pity; it is the Judas who betrayed us.' He poured out a stream of execration against Bazaine in the blunt speech of one accustomed to hear soldiers' confessions. 'The Prussians themselves,' said he, 'have admitted the man's treachery.'

He accompanied Du Breuil to Mme. Guimbail's. There a little old man, who had heard of the death, saluted him. It was M. Poiret, and behind him stood Mme. Poiret. They had come to help Mme. Guimbail in her trouble.

'Will you believe me now, Major,' said the old fellow, in his piping voice, 'when I assure you that Bazaine used to go and confer with Frederick Charles? . . . Houzelle, the gamekeeper, and many others, have seen him.'

He lowered his voice (his wife was pulling him by the sleeve), and offered to find a joiner for the coffin. The Abbé Trudaine was already beside the dead body, praying.

Du Breuil went out with M. Poiret. The latter, drawing himself up revengefully, held forth:

'The captain of a sinking ship is last to leave. Bazaine

saved himself first. But he is already suffering for his crimes. . . . Frederick Charles gave him a taste of shame yesterday morning. There was no longer any need to deal gently, so the Prince refused to receive him before five o'clock. The traitor had to pass the day at Moulins, in the house where he stopped after Borny. He was victorious that evening, and commanded the finest army in France. . . . What a reversion with the past! what humiliation, if he only understood it! They tell me his eyes were full of tears as he looked at the Grenadiers of his escort. That did not prevent him eating an omelette. At four o'clock he drove on in his carriage. When passing through Ars, the people recognised and followed him with groans and hisses. The carriage windows were smashed with stones, and women flung mud over him.'

Du Breuil bent his head. The old man's chirping tones were unbearable. It seemed as if all these reproaches rebounded on himself. Why should he feel guilty if his conscience uttered no reproach?

He left M. Poiret and returned into town. The lifeless image of Restaud haunted him. There was such grave peace on those features, as if in death alone he had found perfect content. Then again he saw Restaud full of life and ardent faith, his eyes burning with feverish light. He compared the two visions, and could not believe the sad thing that had happened. Restaud was not dead; that could not be! . . . He mused: 'Here am I, alive, coming and going. It is I, the unsubmissive one, who passively accept the laws of fate. And Restaud, the resigned, Restaud, who was my example, is no more.'

Respect for discipline—a courageous life was his, yet death had breathed into his soul. Even this suicide, which seemed to have belied a strong, determined career, did not belittle his friend. It only bore out the great law of humanity—the law of sacrifice, sterile for the one who conceives it, but fruitful for others. . . . But D'Avol's visage arose in his mind, rigid with insult and irony. . . . What had become of him, that man Jacques whom he had loved even while hating him, and whom he now detested with all the strength of his former affection? Had he kept his purpose? Had he really passed the enemy's lines? And the others—Barrus, Carrouge—all those who had become desperate at the last hour, driven along by one idea of escape?

He followed the old, familiar road. A battlefield quivering

with ravens was not so loathsome as this foetid mass of mud and carrion, remnants of dead horses, and heaps of swollen intestines. . . . Passing the Porte de France, he saw on the ramparts a trio of Prussian artillery officers busy examining a gun in its embrasure. In Metz the scene was no less doleful : women in mourning, shops closed, the narrow streets full of people, disbanded soldiers carrying their little sackful under their arms, townspeople at the windows and doors, Prussians everywhere. Victors and vanquished walked side by side, in proximity, without intermingling. A poor, humble face turned aside as he passed. He saw it was Mdlle. Sorbet, the old maid whose devoted care had saved Judin from dying.

‘Ah, mademoiselle!’ he said, quite overcome. She recognised him and bent her head. Her smile was sadder than tears. A few faltering, confused words passed between them, then she let down her veil and went away, her Prayer-Book under her arm. She could pray, at least, seeking refuge at the feet of a merciful God !

The eternal fanfare resounded. German troops came past. The bandsmen in front beat their flat drums, while some of the soldiers were executing grotesque dances. The men looked well fed and cared for. They turned curiously at the pale, emaciated French officers whom they met. On such occasions their officers looked another way. Behind the last file there arose a scramble. It was over a cart filled with salt. People ate it by handfuls.

Waggons containing French soldier-prisoners now followed in succession. They were being brought up in loads from their cantonments, where they were dying of cold and hunger. Many of them, thoroughly emaciated, rolled their eyes listlessly ; others, quite stiff, had died on the way. An old Captain, who was going into a house with the help of crutches, said indignantly to Du Breuil :

‘So many the less to transport into Germany ! Those poor fellows have not eaten for two days. . . .’

He pointed to some artillery tumbrels that were being driven by German horses and gunners.

‘Do you recognise them?’ he said. ‘They are our own. They will be sent on to Thionville. Our artillery, just think of it, serving to bombard a French town ! . . . Oh, Bazaine ! Bazaine ! . . .’

A woman wrapped in cashmere, a Jewess’s black scalp-cap encircling her brow, passed them. She was leading two

children, almost albinos. Du Breuil recognised Gugl's wife. There were some German Jews with her. They talked in loud tones, with an arrogant air, looking disdainfully at the officers. Mme. Gugl cast an exulting glance at Du Breuil.

'That riff-raff swarms at present!' said the old officer. 'Yesterday some of the enemy's waggons came into town bringing quantities of bread, wine, meat, eggs, butter and milk. Would you believe it, these Shylocks wanted to buy up everything so as to sell at a big profit! The enemy would have none of their sordid offers, and the provisions have been distributed all round at fair prices.'

'Oh,' he went on, 'these Prussians know what organization is! Prisons, police, street-cleaning, they have taken hold of every department. Their officials are already at work everywhere. General von Kummer is the Governor of Metz. Have you seen his proclamation? He's a man that won't be trifled with! At the divisional headquarters, a German officer, speaking French, distributes road-passes. . . . And their spies,' he added, looking squarely at an individual who was listening to them, 'they are everywhere! Poor Strasburg! poor Metz! They will never give them back!'

A Prussian officer, whose passage was blocked by the old man's crutch, turned aside with a polite salute.

'They are courteous enough, for all that! . . . Another military band! They are crossing Metz in every direction, taking the Paris, Orleans, and Amiens roads. The capitulation of Metz was all they awaited in order to fall upon our poor comrades! Oh, Bazaine! Bazaine! . . .'

A fit of coughing interrupted him, swelling the veins in his neck. He retired into the house.

'Pierre!'

'Maxime!'

A trunk at his feet, Vicomte Judin was passing in a carriage. He ordered his driver to stop, and called out joyously:

'What luck to shake hands with you again! No more army—no more headquarters staff or anything! . . . Didn't know where to find you in this hurly-burly. . . . I am going back to France: is there anything you would like done?'

'No, thanks. I have written a long letter to my father, and no doubt he will get it.'

A question rose to Judin's lips. He was thinking of Mme. de Guëonic. Out of delicacy he refrained. But giving vent to their mutual thoughts, he went on:

‘How awfully long it has seemed! Three months? No, three centuries! . . . Do you know you are getting gray, Pierre? And many others have become white-haired! As for me, I shall go back a cripple. Will the pretty girls recognise us? . . . Our friends at the club must have forgotten our existence.’

He tried to smile, but his heart was not in it. Du Breuil shook his head:

‘All that is far away.’

‘Yes, such is my impression. What changes . . . another Government, another France! Habits and customs, nothing remains of what we left behind. . . .’

‘The past is dead,’ responded Du Breuil. ‘We must heal our wounds, and get some fresh blood into us.’

‘It will take long!’ sighed Judin.

They were silent. Of course it would take long; but France was still standing, though wounded, amputated, and bleeding, and her perennial vigour palpitated even at this moment in her solitary armies, in the strong heart of Paris—of Paris which ever held out, of Paris whom all had unjustly doubted.

‘I am going to take the train at Ars,’ said Judin. ‘The Prussians turned me out of my hotel. They are selecting the best for their quarters. It’s the Hôtel de l’Europe that the Governor von Kummer and his staff have chosen.’

The Hôtel de l’Europe! What a bustle there was at that place when the war broke out! Du Breuil called to mind the little drawing-room on the first-floor, in which thirty officers of the great French general staff scribbled, gossiped, and laughed, doors banging and windows open, amidst a continuous stream of inquirers and journalists. Judin said:

‘I went there yesterday for my passport. Two sentries at the gate, two others at the foot of the stairs. Courtyard empty, an icy stillness! Oh! The cold-blooded precision, the polite stiffness of the officer on duty, brr—! . . .’

He pretended to shiver. Du Breuil’s thoughts went to Restaud. He said sadly:

‘Well, good-bye, old friend! I hope we shall meet again soon!’

‘Don’t lose heart,’ responded Judin. ‘Do you know where you will be sent into captivity?’

‘Mayence, I think. . . .’

They embraced. Judin waved his hat as the carriage was

disappearing. Du Breuil thought enviously: 'Happy man to be able to leave!' A hand rested on his shoulder: it was Laune, looking ghastly pale, his dry features convulsed, but spick and span as ever.

'Do you know what has become of Colonel Charlys?' he asked anxiously.

'No, Colonel.'

'He surely cannot have gone? I refuse to believe, although they assure me of it, that he went with Carrouge, Barrus, and the other hot-heads. . . .'

Du Breuil did not think so. Charlys had disapproved of any such sortie. Laune breathed again. Beneath his icy exterior there lurked an affection for Charlys. His anxiety showed it.

'Our duty now,' he declared, 'is to submit!'

Duty! Oh yes—always duty! He also invoked duty. . . . And no doubt he had a right to do so, never having failed therein. But Restaud had died of it! He told the news to Laune, whose face, after a tremor of surprise, became hard and severe:

'So much the worse,' he said; 'it's sad!'

His tone said clearly, 'It's culpable.' That was all Laune's oration. The sortie made by the last 'piercers' still worried him, for he repeated:

'They could not have got through. Orders were given to stop them.' He looked at Du Breuil in sudden expansiveness. 'You were not present yesterday when General Jarras bade farewell?'

'I had made my excuses to him, Colonel.'

'There were some twenty-five of us, comrades in good and evil fortune, around him,' said Laune. 'All the little jarrings and difficulties of the office were forgotten. It is only right to admit that General Jarras's task was an ungrateful one. He tried to say a few farewell words, but emotion overpowered him. Silently he shook each of us by the hand, and then we were dismissed.'

Laune's steely eyes dimmed with sudden moisture. But he recovered himself, and with a handshake left Du Breuil.

They were all in a state of anxiety at the Bersheims'. Sohier, who tended a wounded man, was casting frequent glances into the courtyard, which the Germans were at that moment leaving. In the drawing-room Du Breuil found Grandmother Sophia, Anine, and Maurice. Mme. Bersheim had withdrawn

to her room to pray. Her husband should have been back long ago. He had left yesterday with Thibaut, for his farm at Noisseville, wishing, as he put it, to ascertain the damages. They could not account for his continued absence. Had the Prussians arrested him? Or were they detaining him as a hostage? Von Kummer's proclamation threatened summary justice to anyone who might be obnoxious to the Germans. . . .

Quaking with fever, Maurice sat by the fireside, staring fixedly at the embers. He narrated to Du Breuil the story of the mixed brigade's surrender.

'Lapasset,' he said proudly, 'came with us as far as the outposts. You should have heard the simple, hearty words he spoke. . . . When the leave-taking came all the soldiers were in tears. They could not tear themselves away from us.'

He described his return through the empty, silent cantonments, the solitude caused by the departure of all these men, who had left nothing but traces of dirt behind, remembrance of their past misery.

Du Breuil, overcome by lassitude, took refuge at the other end of the drawing-room, where he proceeded to tell Anine of Restaud's death. She listened with deep compassion, and, seeing him disheartened, said gently :

'Duty that we may not have strength to fulfil, is duty, none the less. Despite his sufferings, your friend Restaud did not lose sight of the promised land. Let us pity him that could not enter !'

She added :

'Thibaut's little girl is very bad. Think of the poor man's grief when he returns ! . . . Will you come and see her ?'

Du Breuil followed. In a side-room, on a snow-white bed, the child lay, encircled by her blond hair, her eyes closed, her mouth and nose wearing a pinched look. The brother, although forbidden to come, had slipped in, and was then beside her, his eyes wide open with silent terror, listening to that soft, prolonged rattle. Anine crossed herself. Du Breuil felt faint at the sight of this childish innocence sacrificed to war, dying of the poisoned air of a besieged city. He longed to lose all feeling, to suffer no more, to be non-existent. Mechanically he stepped after Anine into Bersheim's study. There they were alone, and she said in a low voice :

'D'Avol came to bid good-bye the day before yesterday. He rode off in full uniform. Could he have passed through ?

I doubt it. His demeanour made me anxious. He seemed ready to dare anything.'

'Yes,' said Du Breuil bitterly, 'anything! By his insults he severed the last ties which bound me to him. My friend Lacoste died first, then Restaud—D'Avol is nothing more than a stranger to me. I am alone in this scattered army, in this place.'

Anine took his hand.

'Don't say that; it is unjust.'

Her smile, her look, told the rest.

'Anine,' he murmured, tender hopes struggling with doubt in his heart, 'can it be true! . . . You feel for me; you have some regard for me?'

He pressed her hand with fervour. She whispered:

'I suffer with you, dear friend. So many things are clear to me now!'

'Oh, how good you are!' he replied fervently.

She read the avowal on his lips, in his look. Beseechingly, she stopped it:

'No, dear friend, we do not belong to ourselves at present; we have not the right to think of ourselves! . . . Later, later. . . .'

'You are right, Anine. But moments are precious. Later—when will that be? Yet . . . But now I dare not utter the word which burns my lips.'

'Why say it, friend? My heart can hear.'

She became scarlet all at once, as if the heart's blood had leapt to her face. Du Breuil gazed at her in sad enchantment.

A carriage drove into the courtyard, its horse all sweltering. Two men, whose faces glistened with fever, utterly exhausted, got down. They were Bersheim and Thibaut.

'Father!'

Bersheim was in Anine's arms. The three of them scanned each other.

'D'Avol has escaped,' said Bersheim. 'By this time he must have reached the frontier!'

Du Breuil's heart beat as if it would burst. What! D'Avol had crossed the Prussian lines! He could serve and fight again! . . . His thoughts were inflamed with jealousy and hatred. Bersheim's story exalted and chilled him. D'Avol had got away in a madcap fit of folly. . . . Followed by the carriage, he went off through fields and forests. Fifteen miles

from Metz, two Uhlans had stopped him, asking by what authority he was thus taking his departure. In reply, D'Avol handed one a printed form, and while the Prussian was trying to read it, he pulled a pistol out of his holster and blew the man's brains out. The other Uhlan ran away. D'Avol then, putting spurs to his horse, rode on at full speed. . . .

The tragedy happened before Bersheim's eyes. Questioned as to his delay, he explained that there had been an accident—one of the wheels broke. They had to go back to Noisseville to find a blacksmith. . . . Maurice came in, followed by Mme. Bersheim, who flung herself on her husband's neck. Under a storm of questions, he recounted afresh the story of D'Avol's escape, which the young Subaltern heard with glistening eyes. Then Bersheim began complaining of the state in which he had found his farm. Nothing was left but smouldering walls. Only one vision hauntingly pursued Du Breuil—D'Avol as he split the Uhlan's skull and escaped! From envying him for his success, he hated him all the more.

In the drawing-room, so Lisbeth announced, were M. Krudger, Sohier, Mme. Le Martrois, and Gustave, waiting. Bersheim began to recite his troubles again. He spoke of the earth laid waste, farm buildings ruined, the garden torn up, trees sawn off at the roots, vineyards pillaged. There would be no harvest for five or six years. All the wine in the cellars had been drunk or wasted. Live stock, corn, forage, furniture, bedding, all had disappeared in the systematic Prussian method of destruction. . . . His resentment exhaled itself in bitter words. While the carriage was being repaired at Noisseville, he had gone in a peasant's cart to explore the neighbourhood, wishing to assure himself of the existence of that threefold girdle of hostile earthworks, the details and plans of which Bazaine had purposely spread abroad. . . . But it proved to be a wild-goose chase! The famous batteries of Sainte-Barbe turned out to be nothing more or less than a simple trench.

M. Krudger smiled grimly.

'To the north-west of Metz, it appears that the Prussian camps at Marange and Moyeuvre, and the batteries at Fèves and Semécourt, have been abandoned for some time. As for the north-east, my son yesterday saw what terrible earthworks they were! Just a pitiful intrenchment, not more than two feet high. We have simply been played with all round! No more stores, they said. But the forts had their stock of pro-

visions! At Plappeville it has been found that there were quantities of barrels of salt pork, biscuits, bags of rice, coffee, fodder, wine, and brandy. . . . And the cellars at the Engineers' barracks contain large stores of pork!

'And did you know,' said Gustave Le Martrois, 'that at the Ursulines, in the Rue Saint-Marcel, there are two hundred and forty thousand mètres of cloth and twenty-five thousand pairs of boots? They could have clothed and shod all those poor soldiers, who still shiver and die in the cold and rain!'

Mme. Le Martrois spoke pityingly of the sufferings of the soldiers and poor of Metz, and described with satisfaction all the aid that was arriving from outside. Caravans of charitable folk were swarming, German deaconesses, ladies' societies from Belgium. Women of Metz hailed with delight these sisters and brethren from foreign lands, from England, Holland, and Luxemburg, who had come to help them in the relief of so much misery. She went into raptures over an enormous ambulance waggon drawn by four horses under the guidance of a chief with flowing beard.

In the silence which followed Maurice's teeth could be heard chattering. He sat doubled up near the fire.

'Come along, you come with me!' suddenly called out Sohier, who had listened sombrely without a word. 'Come with me, my boy! A good bed at the hospital is better than those plans of escape you are meditating!'

And repaid by a grateful look from Anine, who kissed her brother, shrugging his shoulders at the superfluous recommendations with which Bersheim followed him, Sohier led the young Lieutenant away by the arm, with the same bullying air as if he were taking him to the police-station. Du Breuil went out with them. . . . Again there was the cold, the rain, the darkness and mud, and the mournful return to the little house, where two men were nailing Restaud in his coffin. There was the last night-watch over the remains of his friend, the making ready for exile. Breaking the stillness came the occasional sound of a halter-chain and a horse kicking its stall-bar. Cydalise was frisky again, eating away to her heart's desire. . . .

Restaud's funeral took place in the morning. The worthy priest kept his promise, and performed his sacred office. Mme. Guimbail, the Poirets, and a few stray uniforms stood grouped in the little church. Home again, Du Breuil took a general look round—the simple furniture, the iron bedstead, on which

he had passed so many feverish nights, the flowered wall-paper, the belated calendar, still marking 28 : *Prise de Berlin* ! . . .

Never would he forget that little room ! . . . Going down to take leave of Mme. Guimbail, he waited a long time in the parlour. The furtive attentions of his hostess recurred to him, with the idea that it had only rested with himself to find a ready affection on her part. During the requiem he had noticed that she avoided his gaze, keeping her eyes obstinately on her Prayer-Book when she was not wiping the tears from them. At last the door opened to admit the widow. She had been to bathe her tear-stained face. Its emaciated pallor had a delicate charm, which was reflected by the slender body in its plain black dress. Du Breuil thought of this frail form suddenly bending in his embrace, of the lips turning away in a half-reciprocated kiss. He bowed, and in a few heartfelt words thanked her for what she had done for Restaud and for himself. She listened in extreme agitation, flushed and pale by turns. As he shook her hand, a thin, cold hand, rather red, she uttered a little cry, and, rushing away, all in tears, to the door, disappeared, leaving him with the soft, but somewhat ludicrous, memory of what might have been, if he had wished. . . .

CHAPTER VI.

IN Metz, Du Breuil came across Marquis.

‘Not at all surprising,’ said that gossip, ‘that Bazaine should have turned traitor. Do you know what Germany gave him ? Five millions. Sentence of death has been hanging over him since October 20th. Bah ! he is taking away his treasure. That will furnish him every delight at Cassel. It is there that the Field-Mmarshals will go.’

Du Breuil inquired after Carrouge.

‘Carrouge ?’ repeated Marquis. ‘He cut through the enemy’s lines with Barrus and seven hundred and thirty-three gunners.’

A long string of carts came by, loaded with boxes, beds, and furniture. It was the exodus of the country people to their ruined villages. They had flocked in before the siege, fleeing before the invader ; now they were returning. Old women propped on mattresses, and little children, gazed around with astonished eyes. Du Breuil thought he knew some faces : women and girls with features distorted by weep-

ing, who looked at him as they passed, and sombre peasant lads, who turned away their heads. The procession crept along, broken at every step by market carts besieged by hungry buyers or anxious housewives. Soldiers begged for bread; others, heavy with liquor, were cursing Bazaine while a couple of Prussians led them away. The cartloads of red quilting, cradles, and bedsteads still came on. Behind one of them, bare-foot, a bundle at the end of a stick thrown over her shoulder, marched a white-haired crone, one of the Pythonesses of the highway. Here and there came gipsies with their waggons.

Suddenly one of the countrymen—a man in a blue smock, with unkempt beard, and red bandanna round his neck—who was whistling as he whipped up a sorry nag, looked at him with curious eyes. Barrus! There were spies there, then—enemies. . . . Barrus facetiously pulled off his cap to Du Breuil, and went on his way, rolling his shoulders like a true carter.

‘But I know him,’ lisped a very pretty woman, hanging on the arm of her ruddy-faced escort. Mme. de Fontades had caught sight of Du Breuil, and, drawing him closer with a handshake, said:

‘Henri, this is M. Du Breuil. Is it not true, Major, that man is M. Barrus? What a strange fellow! I know him well, with his red Republican ideas!’

‘My dear,’ muttered her husband, with visible fright, ‘speak lower. Do you want to get him arrested?’

Her cheeks were aglow, and the eyes gleamed mischievously. She persuaded Du Breuil to accompany them.

‘Do come; we are going to have some tea!’

He owed her that much for the sake of the visit they had paid together to poor Blache at Saint-Clément’s college.

‘I will make you acquainted with my brother, who arrived yesterday,’ she added, ‘and with whom we are leaving.’

M. de Fontades again grumbled to himself. But she unceremoniously despatched him to buy some cakes, and took Du Breuil’s arm. She was in a joyous mood. It made him feel his sorrow more beside this elegant, capricious woman.

‘You do not know the Abbé?’ she resumed. ‘He is charming!’ And in the parlour, where she led Du Breuil: ‘Georges,’ she said, ‘a friend.’

Looking slender in his fine cassock, a young, sleek-faced man rose to meet them. He was smiling. It was by that smile that Du Breuil, after a little hesitation, which greatly amused Mme. de Fontades, recognised the priest.

'You!' he cried. He drew back so quickly that Décherac's smile faded in uneasiness. 'How you have changed!' he said at last. 'The epaulet suited you better.'

'He is quite unrecognisable!' exclaimed Mme. de Fontades. 'Why, look, he is even tonsured!'

Without a moustache, Décherac's nose seemed to have lengthened, and his chin become more projecting. He had lost all semblance of martial looks. Du Breuil was shocked at such a disguise. But since Restaud's death and the flight of D'Avol, his judgment had become somewhat blunted. Décherac got the benefit of this indulgent listlessness. But his sensitive nature had felt the unvoiced aspersion; and so, resuming his confident air and smile, he said:

'We have to get through as best we can. This dress does honour to its wearer.'

To think that self-respecting people should be reduced to such sophistry! Well! . . . What if he also thought it his duty to escape, no matter how; to go and take his place in the ranks of the defenders? . . . Was it possible in this chaos to do otherwise than interpret duty according to one's convictions? . . . What an awful doubt if he, Du Breuil, should have made a mistake! . . . M. de Fontades came in holding a parcel tied with pink ribbon.

'The French colours,' he said, with a satisfied air, 'still float from the cathedral spire, making fun of the Prussians, who gape up at them in disgust.'

Having drunk some tea, Du Breuil took leave. Despite the kindness of his hosts, he had been unable to overcome his discomfort, and Décherac's smile was still constrained. After all, there would be some danger for him, especially with so compromising a guide as this pretty woman. Du Breuil thought only of the cheery comrade who used to laugh when the bullets were whistling. He gripped the disguised man's hand cordially, and wished him good-luck with all his heart. They had avoided the burning question of the hour, the departure into captivity which was even then encumbering the railway-station of Metz. A first convoy of five hundred general and field officers had left two days previously. Another had been timed to leave last night, and the next one, which started on the morrow, would carry away Du Breuil with Frisch and Cydalise.

Some feverish hours, a night broken with oppressive dreams, and the time of departure for Germany at last came. An hour

before the train left, Du Breuil was on the spot, obeying the victors' orders. On the previous day a Prussian officer had handed him his road-pass at the divisional headquarters. Above the hubbub of a roomful of officers waiting there, irrespective of rank, the German had suddenly rapped his bony fingers on the table, demanding silence. . . . He offered immediate liberty to those who would give their parole not to serve again while the war lasted. . . . An indignant murmur was the only reply. Du Breuil vainly looked for Védél. He, however, met La Manse, who told him the end of the Chasseurs d'Afrique :

'We had halted by the roadside. A young officer of the Prussian general staff came by, making his charger prance and caracol to the top of his bent. The mud flew all over the Chasseurs' uniforms. Complaints were heard, but he went on. "Stop it!" cried a voice. He pretended not to hear. Then they made one rush, and in the twinkling of an eye horse and rider were swept into the ditch.'

Another incident came to Du Breuil's mind, a touching one this time. Entering the noisy, encumbered room had come those two inseparables, Colonel la Maisonval, hobbling as usual, and Captain Laprune—Orestes and Pylades, as they were called. The brave fellows wanted permission to join their men. Du Breuil concluded that Védél had done the same.

Just at this moment, while he was in the waiting-room at the station, uniforms everywhere—Generals, Aides-de-camp, all the chief personnel of the Army of the Rhine—Védél came up to him, and in quiet tones replied to his questioning :

'Why, of course, Pierre, I am going with my men. And I am not the only one. Colonel Saussier with a thousand others have refused to be prisoners on parole. We shall go to some distant fortress. Well, we shall be able to take care of our soldiers. With you it is different ; you have not the personal responsibility of a regimental officer. You have only to do with your superiors and yourself.'

In a voice struggling with emotion, he related the pitiful ordeal of leading his company to the corral.

'If you had seen those brave fellows—old fighters who had never flinched—marching with bent heads like a herd of sheep. No ; I cannot tell you what I suffered, tramping alongside in the mud. . . . I fancied myself back in the ranks the day of our retreat on Verdun. What dust ! . . . Then at Saint-Privat—pretty warm work that was ! . . . On reaching the

Château de Ladonchamps gate, we had to say good-bye. What adieux !'

Du Breuil smiled sadly.

'Poor Casimir ! Do you remember the day you brought those documents to the Ministry of War ?'

He thought of their meeting, and reproached himself for the poor opinion he had then formed of his cousin. Later he had learned to know and appreciate him. He no longer thought him coarse, despite his thick hands and hob-nailed shoes.

'What a lot of big epaulets !' said Védél.

'It's the train for Generals and the headquarters staff,' replied Du Breuil.

And while he exchanged salutes, a feeling of bitterness came over him to see them hurrying along—these men with energetic features, some with white hair, some whose dry, tanned looks marked the sprightly African warrior ; others stout and heavy, as if fossilized by the cosy inertia of a provincial command, or exhausted by society life—drawing-room officers, habitués of the Opera. Those who had served in the cavalry could be picked out by their brisk, decisive bearing, while the infantry and staff generals were less wieldy. Surrounded by their Aides-de-camp, who hovered about on the alert, all these chiefs, whether old or young, wore, under their oak-leaf-embroidered caps, the pride of command in their steely eyes. If some stooped as if under the weight of a crushing burden, many, on the other hand, stood erect, boldly facing the past, and thinking of the future. Many had fulfilled their duty, and could boast themselves free of reproach. Their frank, stern faces, crossed with suffering and resignation, had that day an expression of greater dignity than ever, coupled with the splendour that comes from the soul.

In silence Du Breuil and Védél regarded them, thinking of a leader's duties, the terrible responsibility assumed by these lords of the soldier's life and honour ! They recounted their names as they passed, and their hearts warmed with the hope that some of them one day, sooner or later, would lead them to revenge. If they saw one of them compelled to approach the Prussian officers who were arranging the departure, they were sorry for him. Some held aloof, encircled by their Aides-de-camp. Others were giving orders in a loud, imperious voice, as if they were still in command. But, despite the endeavour to remain dignified to the end, none could repress an occasional look of fury, a laugh of despair. Boisjol saw Du Breuil, but

turned his back. Chenot huddled his shoulders, wrapped in a fur coat, his red neck gleaming over the collar. . . . Du Breuil thought of all the missing ones who, at the outbreak of hostilities, had formed part of the imperial general staff: Jaillant, Lebrun, and others who were in captivity since Sedan fell. . . . And when he came out on the platform and saw the immense train of over fifty compartments and waggons coupled to two locomotives, it reminded him of another sight; the feverish bustle of the crowd, with all its gold lace and crosses, amid a constant rustling of heavy-bullioned epaulets, made him think of the departure from the little station at Saint-Cloud one summer day, of another train, of dark-green carriages with a gilt N, bearing the Emperor and the Prince Imperial and their escort of Generals and Aides-de-camp, and, along with them, the destinies of the country, the fortunes of France!

Where were they now, the destinies of the country, the fortunes of France? Who could distinguish them through the gloom of this mournful autumn day? . . . Generals and Aides-de-camp piled into the gigantic train; this time they were not travelling to glory, but to exile and bondage, in the bitterness of humiliation such as had not been seen.

Védel smiled.

'Some third-class carriages! You will have a seat, at all events!'

Du Breuil understood; the officers who came in the next trains and the thousands of soldiers would have to journey in goods or cattle waggons, exposed to all the inclemency of the weather.

He had already shaken hands with Charlys and Laune, who were taking places in front.

'Are you getting in with us?' Laune had asked.

And Du Breuil reserved a seat by covering it with his cloak and satchel. Around them there was a general rush. Horses were being entrained amidst the bustle of orderlies.

'We do not start for another hour,' said Massoli, coming up. He looked twenty years younger, cleanly shaven, and his hair shining like boot-blackening. Had they provisioned the Metz hairdressers? 'The Guards are awaiting their turn,' he said. 'The officers have been standing in the rain for some hours past.' He lowered his voice: 'Is there any news of Major Leperche?'

Bourbaki's Aide-de-camp had determined to get away at all hazards.

‘And of Carrouge?’

‘Carrouge?’ said Massoli, with satisfied irony; ‘why, he is there with his comrades! He couldn’t cross the lines, and gave it up. That’s wisest.’

Du Breuil set out to look for Carrouge. He found him outside the station, trembling with rage, his arms crossed, glaring fixedly at a sentry who formed part of the line of surveillance.

‘Would you believe it?’ he murmured. ‘Those brutes have just loaded their rifles before us, just as if we were convicts!’ He added: ‘I didn’t get through. Wandered about all Friday night, and stumbled against the French outposts. They kept me under guard, and brought me back to camp. I hope Leperche was more lucky!’

Marquis broke in. But before he had time to say a word, Carrouge scorched him with a look.

‘Oh, come now! enough of your nonsense! You just leave us alone, old moon-calf!’ And in a lower voice he said, with a shrug: ‘I never saw such a fool!’

In the large waiting-room, Du Breuil, still followed by Védél, suddenly found himself confronting Bersheim and Anine. Everyone noticed the girl. She looked very tall in her mourning.

Du Breuil was overcome with joy mixed with sadness. He had bidden farewell to the hospitable house, taken cheery leave of Grandmother Sophia, Mme. Bersheim and her husband, and kissed Anine’s hand. He did not expect to see them again. The feeling of kindness and affection which had brought them there affected him to tears. So they had wished to relieve his departure of its bitter loneliness. Bersheim got hold of Védél, while there before everybody Du Breuil and Anine, with the loyalty of simple hearts who have nothing to conceal, gazed into each other’s eyes, all their being deliciously thrilled.

Love transfigured the lame, homely words they exchanged, giving a strange sweetness to the agony of departure. He and she seemed all alone, and through the cold and darkness of the road the girl’s image would remain before him. The vision disappeared. Orders to take their seats! Bersheim and Anine went away. The crape veil, the brown hair, and white neck vanished in the distance. Du Breuil could only see Védél, who was smiling.

Then they hugged each other again and again.

‘Don’t lose heart!’ they both urged with a smile; but the tears would fall down their cheeks.

'Here, Du Breuil!' called Charlys.

He got into the compartment. Francastel and Floppe were there, also fat Colonel Jacquemère, who was mopping himself, having run. Then followed half an hour's wait. Du Breuil saw Frisch's anxious face, wanting to tell him that Cydalise was all right. Védél stood on the platform, ever smiling. Charlys talked as though in a fever-fit, and Jacquemère was overhauling his trunk. Du Breuil withdrew into himself, under a darkly-luminous spell. . . . A short hallucination came over him, revealing past incidents in the glitter of street-lamps on wet, black pavement. It was night on the Place de la Concorde, and Mme. de Guñonic's brougham sped along, its lamps gleaming yellow on the shiny roadway. . . . Change of scenery to polished floors reflecting many tapers at the evening reception at Saint-Cloud: Jousset-Gournal sanctimonious, M. Chartrain anxious. . . . 'Well, he will see his son again, if he does not die in a dungeon! . . .' Mme. d'Avilar, Mme. Langlade . . . ah! The little Lieutenant stretched out with rifled pockets on the battlefield of Rezonville, his ring-finger sawn off.

Big Manhers, Favergues the publicist, Admiral La Véronnech, the arrogant Count Duclos, the whole array of councillors and mainstays of the Empire, are there, in humming groups, excited over the Duc de Grammont's declaration. . . . Where are they now? . . . The whirlwind has passed. No doubt many are saying, 'I told you so!' while they blaspheme the Government which made them. . . . What are the old Du Breuils thinking of, withdrawn far from the world in their château in the recesses of the Creuse? . . . And Thédénat in his little parlour, where the caged canaries flap their wings, does he ponder on the fulfilment of his prophecies, while Mme. Thédénat plies her needle, giving ear to the boom of siege-guns?

'We are off!' cried Francastel joyously, with a sigh of relief.

The train started, and in mortified silence Generals and officers of the Army of the Rhine sped out of the city whither they had come so full of hope. Charlys and Du Breuil exchanged looks.

'On the road again!' said Charlys.

Yes, thought Du Breuil, it was they who remained that were to be pitied, the ones upon whom devolved the task of making lists and inventories; they would have to drink the

cup to the last dregs. Floppe was relating the arrest of M. Mayer, editor of the *Indépendant de la Moselle*. A Prussian officer had made it in the station. The last order signed by Bazaine had been one for the punishment of this journalist, who, despite intimidation and censure, had been courageous enough, on the very day of the capitulation of Metz, to call attention in his foremost columns to Article 209 of the Military Code: 'Punishment of death and degradation for any Governor or Commandant who surrenders the fort which has been entrusted to him;' and Article 210: 'Punishment of death and degradation for any Commander-in-Chief who capitulates in the field before doing all that duty and honour require.'

Laune's head was riveted at the window, his lips compressed, and his whole manner breathing dignified silence. They passed by the station workshops and sped beside the Nancy road, of which the trees had been cut down, exposing to view the meadows sloping towards the Moselle. This road had been the *via dolorosa* of the negotiator for capitulation and his officers. To the left rose the hills of Montigny, whence, on August 15th, had sped that insulting shell which, falling beside the imperial quarters, hastened the Emperor's flight.

The train slackened, heads craned out; they were stopping. 'What's the matter?' asked Francastel.

Laune did not answer. At length Jacquemère said: 'Our men!'

A long column of prisoners was passing some distance from the road, with bent heads and shoulders, flanked on each side by soldier-guards. Many a white face in the crowd had turned towards the train. And these old Generals, who had braved death on the battlefield, and heard without flinching the desperate cries of the wounded, now paled and lowered their eyes. Many a one, perhaps, that had isolated himself in the altitude of his rank, felt remorse and bitterly felt his impotence. Too late now for the cheering word or the look that consoles. All realized how much gratitude they owed these men, who to the last day had done them credit, and with flushed faces, moved by a common impulse, they rushed to the windows to salute their noble comrades in misfortune, the obscure heroes of Rezonville and Saint-Privat.

When every man in this immense convoy had tasted his sorrow, the train resumed its way.

Some minutes later it stopped again.

'What's the matter?' asked Du Breuil this time.

Laune did not answer. His face could not be seen, but his shoulders heaved convulsively.

Charlys got up precipitately, uttering a shout of rage :
'Oh, our colours!'

Du Breuil, Jacquemère, and Floppe, squeezed in to get a look. From the whole length of the train arose the fierce, desperate cry : 'Our colours! our colours!' . . . Facing Frescati Château a long, broad lawn extended to the railway line, and there, planted in two rows, forming an avenue of fame, were all the standards. A Prussian foot soldier quietly mounted guard. The eagles surmounting the poles glittered with outstretched wing. Their folds of glorious tattered silk, whereon the deeds of each regiment were blazoned in letters of gold, hung limply. Some had the cross of honour, reflecting an added distinction. In the tricolour gleamed the blood of the dead and the blue sky of their country. The soul of the Revolution and the triumphs of the two Empires throbbed in those fame-laden trophies.

'Fifty-three eagles!' counted Charlys.

'No,' said Floppe. 'Forty-one—that's the official number.'
Charlys growled :

'Count them yourself! Bazaine didn't stick at a dozen colours, more or less. He gave good measure. . . . By the spadeful! . . . by the heap! . . .'

He wrung his hands. Laune kept down the tears. Floppe ground out :

'We can't come up to them! . . . What a brutal stage-effect! what refinement of torture! . . .'

Du Breuil raised his head.

Had the enemy captured those standards in battle? No. . . . It was only by subterfuge that Bazaine could deliver them into the enemy's hands. And those that were lost, either by burning or destruction, discounted the humiliation meted out to the remainder! . . . This row of eagles was nothing but a mass of dumb, lifeless matter. . . . How could it affect the vanquished? . . . The enemy might buffet captive Generals with these profaned tatters; they might strew our soldiers along the muddy road to the uttermost parts of Germany; but every Frenchman there could look without shame, boldly, at the dazzling proofs of France's immortal pride thus displayed. What mattered the overthrow of the Empire, or such reverses as Sedan and Metz? What mattered the misfortunes that might follow? Hope revived in every breast; fortune

would change; the blackest clouds have a silver lining. Despair was banished.

In the chilly compartment, where every man was silent as if in a death-room, Du Breuil mused with gleaming eyes. . . . Lacoste, Restaud, Blache, and so many brave fellows whom he loved, were no more! . . . War with its red sickle had cut deep into the quivering flesh of the nation. A chorus of wailing rose up from desolate hearths. He cursed these times of dreadful trial. But since he had lived through them, let them at least serve as a lesson! They had drifted into presumptuous idleness, into the disintegrating influence of a life of carelessness and pleasure, and the awaking had been full of horror. But over this black darkness would rise a morn of redemption. However dreadful it might be, war had taught him to know himself, and to know others. In many souls it had wakened dormant energies. It had given the lesson of endurance, of unity, of heroism. It had slain many men, but created others. The example of the dead would fortify the living.

In the awful crucible where the disaster had heaped, along with the trophies of the Empire, arms, filth, ruined fortunes, illusions destroyed, all the despair of a nation—the future boiled like metal in fusion. Out of it a new France would arise.

THE END.



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